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Experts say call police in crises with mentally ill By ROBERT CROWE and ALEXIS GRANT

Despite the recent fatal shooting of a pipe-wielding man by Houston police, experts encourage the public to keep calling law enforcement when a mentally ill person becomes violent.

Experts stressed that loved ones should ask for a Crisis Intervention Team and make clear when an incident involves a mentally ill person.

"If the situation is really volatile and the family has to do something right there to protect themselves, then by all means they should call 911," said Betsy Schwartz, executive director of the Mental Health Association of Greater Houston.

Steven Guillory's family is angry with police because, they said, his mother warned dispatchers that the man had a history of mental illness when she reported his violent behavior.

Houston police said officers on Saturday night shot and killed Guillory, 39, because he charged at them while holding a pipe in the 6600 block of Foster in southeast Houston. It was at least the second similar shooting death this year in the area.

HPD Capt. Bruce Williams said about 500 officers are trained by the Crisis Intervention Team to respond to mentally ill suspects, but the Police Department does not actually have a CIT unit that responds to incidents. HPD would ideally like to send a CIT-trained officer for all mentally ill suspects, but it does not have the manpower, he said.

Earlier this month, Houston Police Chief Harold Hurtt reprimanded a captain for failing to use SWAT or hostage-negotiating teams in the January shooting death of Omar Esparza, a mentally ill man whose family called police.

HPD said Sunday the Guillory incident "did not offer an opportunity" for a Crisis Intervention Team.

Guillory's family said that police had plenty of time to call for a crisis mediator because the first two officers to arrive to the scene were there for 20 minutes before backup officers arrived, said activist Quanell X.

"That's news to me," Williams said.

Police said one officer shot Guillory with a Taser that failed to subdue the man. After that, Guillory pummeled a police car with the pipe while the officers called for backup.

Officers Tracy D. Jackson, a seven-year HPD veteran, and Robert B. Wieners, a first-year HPD officer, then shot and killed Guillory.

Williams said HPD had been called to the home three times in two years, but he said police don't know which homes have residents with mental illness.

Families in emergency situations can call the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County at 713-970-7000 to request a Mobile Crisis Outreach Team.

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