

SFPD Chief Greg Suhr resigns after police killing of woman

By [Emily Green](#), [Bob Egelko](#), [Jenna Lyons](#), and [Erin Alliday](#) Updated 11:14 am, Friday, May 20, 2016

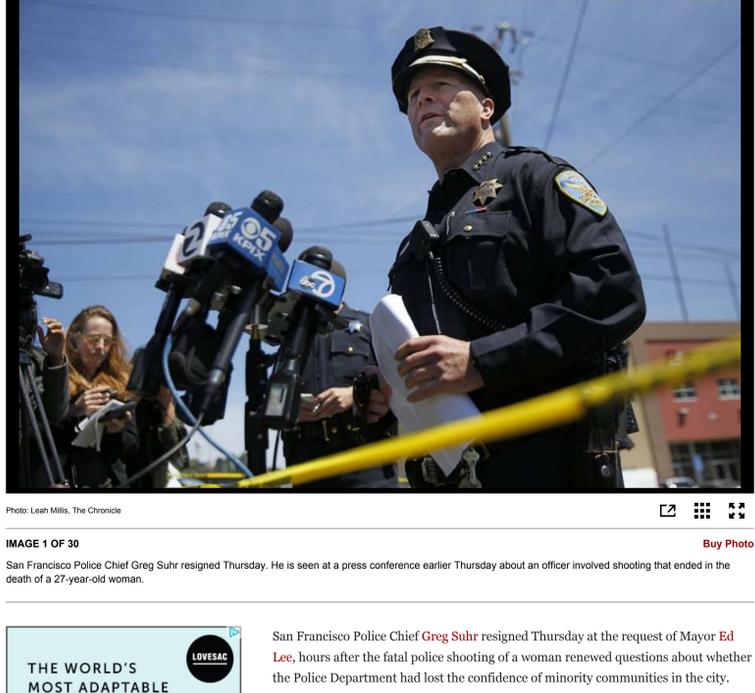


Photo: Leah Mills, The Chronicle

IMAGE 1 OF 30

Buy Photo

San Francisco Police Chief Greg Suhr resigned Thursday. He is seen at a press conference earlier Thursday about an officer involved shooting that ended in the death of a 27-year-old woman.



San Francisco Police Chief **Greg Suhr** resigned Thursday at the request of Mayor **Ed Lee**, hours after the fatal police shooting of a woman renewed questions about whether the Police Department had lost the confidence of minority communities in the city.

Lee had stood by the chief he appointed in 2011 through two controversial police shootings within the past six months and revelations that a number of officers had exchanged racist and homophobic text messages. But at a late-afternoon news conference at City Hall, the mayor said that after Thursday's shooting, he had "arrived at a different conclusion to the question of how best to move forward."

Lee said in remarks that lasted five minutes.

"The progress we have made has been meaningful, but it hasn't been fast enough, not for me and not for Greg, and that's why I have asked Chief Suhr for his resignation,"

Lee named as acting Police Chief **Toney Chaplin**, 47, a deputy chief overseeing the department's professional standards and principled policing bureau. The mayor said that he and the **Police Commission** would begin a national search for a permanent replacement.

SFGATE

SF GATE

The announcement came after Lee and Suhr met in the mayor's office, with the departing chief exiting a side door without speaking to reporters. Chaplin stood at Lee's side during the news conference.

Suhr's resignation came after a tumultuous day that began when two officers came upon a black woman in a sedan on the edge of the Bayview district. The officers suspected the car was stolen, but before they could question the woman, she drove off, police said.

The car crashed into a utility truck a short distance away. Although no weapon was found on the woman and the car was wedged under the truck, a police sergeant fired a single shot, killing her, police said.

Probe just starting

Police said the shooting investigation was in its early stages. Lee agreed that "the facts are still emerging," but said, "These officer-involved shootings, justified or not, have forced our city to open its eyes to questions of when and how police use lethal force."

Lee said police shootings had "shaken and divided our city, and tensions between law enforcement and communities of color that have simmered for too many years have come into full view. ... The community is grieving, and I join them in that grief."

Lee added, "In this solemn moment, we must put aside politics and begin to heal the city."

RELATED STORIES

SF police shooting of woman, 27, renews concern about lethal force

Ex-cop who blew whistle on officer says she was forced to retire

For the mayor, the shooting happened under the worst circumstances at the worst possible time — what appeared to be an unarmed woman who was black, shot by a sergeant who apparently used none of the de-escalation tactics that Suhr and Lee had been pushing for months.

Before the shooting, there was a feeling in the mayor's office that public anger about police conduct had peaked and that the chief could stay in his position, at least for several months, said a source close to Lee who was not authorized to speak for attribution.

Thursday's shooting made that possibility untenable, the source said.

Lee appointed Suhr, 57, in April 2011 when George Gascon became district attorney. Suhr had the backing of the police union and state Attorney General **Kamala Harris**, Gascon's predecessor as district attorney.

But Suhr presided over a series of controversies, including the arrests of officers, allegations of racism and racial profiling in the force, and disputed officer-involved shootings.

Two shootings in particular had resulted in calls for Suhr to resign — the December killing of 26-year-old **Mario Woods**, a stabbing suspect who appeared to be stumbling along a Bayview sidewalk with a knife in his hand when officers shot him more than 20 times, and the April killing in the Mission District of Luis Gongora, 45, a homeless man holding a knife who was shot by an officer less than 30 seconds into a sidewalk confrontation.

Suhr initially defended the officers involved in the Woods shooting, but backtracked as videos circulated that called into question whether Woods had posed an immediate threat. After viewing video of the Gongora incident, Suhr said officers had not appeared to try to de-escalate the situation.

The **U.S. Justice Department** division in charge of police-community relations is conducting a top-to-bottom review of San Francisco police, and the Police Commission is wrestling with a series of proposals for changing the department's use-of-force rules.

Calls for ouster

Even before Thursday, Suhr had lost the support of four progressives on the 11-member **Board of Supervisors**. One of those who had stuck by the chief, Supervisor **Norman Yee**, said that "with this recent incident today, which is tragic, I think the mayor is doing the right thing asking for his resignation."

"The chief is a good guy," Yee said. "He does care about people in San Francisco. And I'm sure that weighed into this decision."

Supervisor **Aaron Peskin**, who had declined to comment earlier on whether Suhr should stay, said, "It was an untenable situation, and what needed to happen has happened. The events of this morning were above and beyond the pale."

Supervisor **Scott Wiener** had called for Suhr to stay on, and said nothing that happened Thursday changed that.

"I don't agree with the decision," Wiener said. "I continue to have confidence in and enormous respect for Greg Suhr."

The board's most progressive members — Supervisors **Jane Kim**, **David Campos**, **Eric Mar** and **John Avalos** — abandoned Suhr after protests spread in reaction to the earlier shootings. Five people went on a 17-day hunger strike to try to force his departure.

The mood was subdued, not celebratory, Thursday evening in front of City Hall, where several dozen people — many of whom had been demanding Suhr be fired — gathered after the resignation was announced. Activists said they did not consider Suhr's departure a victory.

"It feels strange to celebrate when another person is dead at the hands of SFPD," said **Chiedza Kundidzora**, 33, of San Francisco.

In a speech before the crowd, Nation of Islam Minister **Christopher Muhammad** said Suhr's resignation came too late.

"The mayor knew that this chief should have been gone six months ago," he said. "We're more angry now because two more souls have lost their life since Mario Woods' murder."

Lee "was playing politics with the lives of black and brown and poor people, and that's a crime against humanity," Muhammad said. "We're not happy about this. Now we might have to fire the mayor."

Outside the Hall of Justice, most rank-and-file officers declined to comment on Suhr's departure. A few said he would be missed, especially among long-term veterans who had worked under him for years.

"Sad to see him go. He was a good guy," said Officer **Jimmy Lewis**, a 29-year veteran. Lewis had been disciplined 10 years ago for his involvement in a scandal known as "Videogate," in which officers in the department's Bayview Station made a racist, sexist and homophobic videotape.

Suhr, then deputy chief, "helped me out," Lewis said. "It was a difficult time for me. He gave me moral support."

Support from officers

"He is probably one of the more progressive chiefs the department has had," said Officer G. Latus, a 19-year veteran.

Martin Halloran, head of the Police Officers Association, issued a statement calling Suhr "a cop's cop" and labeling his departure "a great disappointment."

"His strong leadership, his innovative programs and his hands-on approach have set a standard in the department that will be difficult to repeat," Halloran said.

He added that the union would work with acting Chief Chaplin, whom Halloran called "more than capable of leading this fine department during this transition."

Emily Green, Jenna Lyons, Bob Egelko and Erin Alliday are San Francisco Chronicle staff writers. Email: egreen@sfgate.com, jlyons@sfgate.com, beigelko@sfgate.com, eallday@sfgate.com

PROMOTED STORIES

Ever Google Yourself? Do A "Deep Search" Instead (Instant Checkmate)

The Best Kept Secret in Mattresses (GQ)

Jim Cramer's Tip For California Homeowners (It's Genius) (Forbes)

You've Been Slicing Watermelon All Wrong (The Grommet)

AROUND THE WEB

The Hearing Aid of the Future is Here (Hear.com)

Invisible Hearing Aids Have Just Become A Reality (hear.com)

Body Reactions To Look Out For If You Have Diabetes! (Health Central- Diabetes Slideshows)

Honda's Billion-Dollar Baby: The ATC90 ATV (Motorcycle News: Motorcycle Industry and Consumer News | Motorcyclist)

If You Owe Less Than \$300k, Use Obama's Once-In-A-Lifetime Mortgage Relief Program (LowerMyBills.com)

Thinking About Going Solar? Read This First (Home Solar Programs)

You'll See Why Australia Is So Terrifying After This (Viral Guppy)

VIEW COMMENTS

MORE FROM SFGATE

Melania Speech Controversy: Donald Trump Campaign Chairman Blames Hillary Clinton

Extremely polite man discovers strange woman in his attic, calls the ordeal 'just weird'

Camp kids lead Oakland Black Lives Matter demonstration

Attorney: Minnesota woman denies treating nanny like slave

Jesse Williams Rips Melania Trump Speech Amidst Plagiarism Accusations

Rally House to Host Reds Rally Fest on Saturday

SWAT team raids suspected illegal Oakland gambling den after shooting

Recommended by @utbrain

TRENDING NOW

Secret Service launches investigation after Trump... (SF Gate- Business Insider)

Dear Abby: I'm hurt that wife wants her own bank... (Entertainment)

TOUGH ON SWEAT, NOT ON SKIN. Dove MEN+Care. **CLEAN COMFORT** (Unscented). **DEODORANT**. **LEARN MORE**

PROMOTED STORIES

This Year's Crop of Lemons: 13 Cars to Not Buy... (Forbes)

The New 2016 Crossovers (Yahoo Search)

Retiring Happily Abroad: 21 Best Places (TheStreet)

Why Kate Hudson's Workout Line is Better (and... (Fabletics by Kate Hudson)

Homeowners Born Before 1985 Are Getting a Huge... (FetchRate)

Recommended by @utbrain

MOST POPULAR

1 Police give all-clear in Munich shooting; say suspect dead

2 Semiconductor innovator Mark Templeton dies at 57

3 Man knocked out during fight on SF Muni bus

4 More flights scrapped as Southwest Airlines continues to struggle

5 Hillary Clinton chooses Va. Sen. Tim Kaine as running mate

6 Updated: Thousands of bees surround truck on Geary Street in...

7 SF man who raped unconscious woman sentenced to 8 years

8 The deadliest terror attack in SF history happened 100 years...

9 San Francisco's most expensive listing: \$28.5 million Pacific...

10 Judge rules tech mogul Gurbaksh Chahal violated probation

Baby clothes for all of life's little joys. **SHOP NOW**

PRESENTED BY:

If You Want to Laugh, Watch This Video

Try to watch this without ROFL.

PRESENTED BY: Verizon Wireless

LATEST NEWS

Woman struck and killed by train in San Leandro

SF Health Department reports 2 new Zika cases

Motorcyclist struck, killed in collision with car on Hwy. 17

Gov. Brown denies parole for Charles Manson follower

Sea lettuce turns beaches in Seaside green

SF man who raped unconscious woman sentenced to 8 years

Man knocked out during fight on SF Muni bus

Prominent Silicon Valley VC dies in kayak accident

YOUR STUDENT CAN APPLY FOR THEIR LOAN IN 15 MINUTES OR LESS.

APPLY NOW

DISCOVER Student Loans. Get It Done. Fast. Member FDIC.