



## Michigan citizens deserve to know what their SWAT teams are doing

*Raids are part of what SWAT teams do - as in this case, where members of the Phoenix, Ariz., Police Department SWAT team exit the garage of the home of a suspected gunman who opened fire in an office building, wounding three people in January 2013. But some believe SWAT teams have been too aggressive and careless in their raids.*

By: Ken Braun – July 27, 2013

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When he was born 61 years ago, his mother named him John Adams, just like the American patriot and President. This spring, he died on a Drug War battlefield in Lebanon, Tennessee, when two twenty-something young men invaded his home and pumped at least three shots into him.

According to a local ABC affiliate, the “battlefield” was his living room, and the young gunmen were police officers bursting through the wrong door. The alleged drug suspects the cops were searching for supposedly lived next door. So, Adams appeared to be living in a sketchy neighborhood, and was not inclined to answer politely when armed men occupied his porch.

Mrs. Adams survived the attack and says the police never identified themselves. The police disagree, saying Mr. Adams met them with a shotgun.

Disputes about whether or not cops identify themselves during raids are not rare. Last week, Radley Balko wrote about another one in the Wall Street Journal. He is the author of a new book on the subject: *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America’s Police Forces*.

In 2006, he wrote an exhaustive report for the Cato Institute filled with stories of “botched” raids. It includes more disagreements about cops failing to identify themselves; a few more bad addresses; and more innocent people, cops and even pets being gunned down.

Many of his examples are of violent confrontations due to similar misunderstandings, even after police have located legitimate, though very minor and often non-violent suspects. Minor marijuana possession allegations are common in these narratives.

The criticism of Balko’s work is that he relies too much on media accounts. This would be hilarious if it were not so tragic, because that’s almost all he has to go on. For the most part, police departments don’t provide public reports about the behavior of their SWAT units, despite what one academic analysis concluded was nearly six such raids taking place in America *every hour*(50,000 per year in 2005.)

When I was in high school during the 1980s, it was just 8 raids per day; and just one every few

days during the 1970s. Unless America has become a hundred times more violent since my childhood, we are owed an explanation.

State Rep. Tom McMillin, R-Rochester Hills, has introduced House Bill 4914. Replicating a similar law in Maryland, it would require police departments to give two reports per year about the details of every SWAT raid. The reports would explain why each raid took place; the legal authority (warrant) for it; the arrests made and evidence seized (if any); whether or not the weapons of the police were discharged and if any deaths to persons or pets took place.

These raids - both valid and otherwise - frequently occur in low income neighborhoods where the people impacted don't have the ability to legally fight the system if it abuses them. Unless something tragic happens, as in the Adams case, there is little reason any independent outside investigator would know to look for a problem.

Michigan's law enforcement community may not be supportive of this public snooping. But consider: Even if 99 percent of these raids are legitimate, that leaves American SWAT teams responsible for more than one needlessly violent home invasion *every day*. Each erodes a community's trust in the cops.

Michigan's top law enforcement official should make himself responsible for protecting that trust.

The Attorney General would be required to administer the SWAT reports McMillin seeks to create.

Attorney General Bill Schuette should enthusiastically support the proposal and set an early example for all of law enforcement.