

Strike violence escalates

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Violence in the four-month-old frozen food strike escalated Saturday, with shootings at three places in Watsonville.

Watsonville police say they don't know if the incidents are related, but blamed strikers for them and said it is "a miracle" no one was hurt.

One incident threatened the family of a Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. manager and the others threatened the lives of several company workers.

In the first incident, a high-powered rifle was used in an early morning attack on the home of Fernando Ramirez, a plant manager at Watsonville Canning.

Police are unsure whether two or three shots were fired into the Ramirez home at 555 McKenzie Road. Details were sketchy, but police said one bullet hit the bedpost of the bed Ramirez and his wife were sleeping in, narrowly missing them.

Police Chief Ray Belgard said that he thanked God that moments before the shots were fired, at about 3 a.m., Ramirez had, coincidentally, arrived home from work and moved his two children out of the bedroom.

The bullet entered the bedroom through the wall, then broke the bedroom window, went through the backyard fence, and hit a cinder block wall behind the house.

The police are unsure whether it was two or three shots that were fired at the house.

This is the second time the Ramirez home has been attacked in the last two weeks. The house was firebombed four days before Christmas, at about the same time in the morning, while family members slept. They were unharmed in the ensuing fire, which caused thousands of dollars of damage.

The home of another Watsonville Canning manager was also firebombed last month when someone tossed a molotov cocktail at the house of Larry Allen Vawter, the firm's personnel manager. No one was hurt in that incident.

Belgard said witnesses have described the car used in that shooting, and his department may soon have some suspects identified.

A second incident Saturday occurred around 4 a.m.

Two Watsonville Canning workers told police that someone followed them as they walked to their car near the

plant. Several shots were fired, they said. Two shots struck the workers' car.

Police say they may also have suspects in the third shooting incident Saturday at about 5:30 a.m. at Harkins Slough and Green Valley roads.

Three Watsonville Canning employees had just gotten off work when they were followed by two cars, Bixler said. A chase ensued along Harkins

Slough.

The occupants of the two cars doing the chasing fired numerous shots at the workers' car. Bixler said police are unsure if the workers shot back.

The worker driving the car lost control of the car and pulled onto an open field along Silverleaf Drive. The three employees, all in their twenties, then ran from the car, as the people in the other two cars fired at them.

REFERENCE

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