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San Diego Man Charged with Hate Crime

SDG&E Worker was Physically, Verbally Targeted by Defendant

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott today announced that her Office has filed hate crime and battery charges against a San Diego man who hurled racial slurs and struck an SDG&E worker after coming upon a late-night road closure where utility workers were repairing an electrical box.

The incident took place at about 11:10 p.m. on Sept. 15, 2021, at an SDG&E roadblock at the corner of Voltaire Street and Mendocino Boulevard in the community of Point Loma Heights.

Traffic cones, signs, and an SDG&E truck with hazard and amber lights warned motorists of the upcoming detour. After being told of the road closure by an SDG&E traffic controller in a reflective shirt, neon vest, and hard hat, the defendant, Roger Stefan Witthoeft, Jr., exited his pickup truck and verbally and physically confronted the worker, a Latino man.

Witnesses told police that Witthoeft shouted a number of racial slurs at the worker, as well as variations on, “Why don’t you talk in English you f---ing immigrant?” and “Go back to your country you f---ing immigrant.” Witnesses told police that Witthoeft urged the worker to fight him, shoved the worker, and swung at the worker, knocking off his hardhat.

Witthoeft was arraigned on March 1, 2022, on charges of committing battery, with a hate crime enhancement, and violating the victim’s constitutional rights by threat of force. Trial is scheduled in April.

San Diegans are encouraged to report hate crimes to the San Diego Police Department. Hate crimes are crimes, often involving violence, in which perpetrators act based on a bias against the victims’ race, color, religion, or national origin, or such factors as actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or gender.

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