

## Noise Sensors Back Police On Shooting Of D.C. Teen

By Carol D. Leonnig  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Wednesday, October 31, 2007; A01

Gunshot sensors indicate that the first shot fired in the police confrontation with 14-year-old DeOnté Rawlings did not come from the off-duty D.C. officers at the scene but from a higher-caliber weapon close to where the slain youth fell, law enforcement sources said.

The data provide support to the account of Officer [James Haskel](#), who said he was not the first to fire a gun the night of Sept. 17. But it does not settle the question of whether DeOnté fired a weapon. Haskel has said he shot the youth after he engaged in a running gun battle with DeOnté over a stolen minibike.

The sensor system, known as the ShotSpotter, indicated that eight shots were fired by the police weapon, a 9mm Glock, and that four shots came from a higher-caliber weapon, which police believe to be a .45-caliber handgun, according to four law enforcement sources. ShotSpotter Inc., the company that provides the sensors, helped perform the analysis for D.C. and federal authorities.

The sources spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the case. They said that investigators have retrieved seven of the eight casings from Haskel's gun. Shell casings from a .45-caliber gun were recovered, but the gun that DeOnté allegedly fired was not found at the scene in Southeast Washington.

An autopsy showed the youth died of a gunshot wound in the back of the head, and his body was marked with bruises and scrapes.

The case has generated community tensions and a lawsuit from the Rawlings family, which contends that the youth never would have fired a weapon. Law enforcement specialists also have questioned the judgment of Haskel and his friend, Officer [Anthony Clay](#), who were out of uniform and acting on their own when they set off in Haskel's sport-utility vehicle in search of the minibike. Haskel believed that the minibike had been stolen from his home, police have said.

Gregory Lattimer, the attorney for the Rawlings family, called the analysis of the sensor data "pure poppycock," and he repeated his contention that the officers acted improperly. "The facts are the facts," he said. "DeOnté Rawlings didn't have a gun and didn't shoot anybody."

Haskel and Clay, who live in a Washington Highlands development, told authorities that they found DeOnté riding the minibike nearby in the 600 block of Atlantic Avenue SE. Haskel has told authorities that the youth shot at him and that he responded by getting out of his SUV and firing his 9mm service weapon at DeOnté. Authorities have said that Haskel and Clay did not have a chance to identify themselves as police officers.

The law enforcement sources cautioned that ShotSpotter, though a useful tool, is not the final word and that its data must be corroborated by other evidence. ShotSpotter data, on its own, has not yet been admitted in court as evidence against a defendant.

The gunshot sensors -- part of a network installed last year on rooftops in many city neighborhoods -- were used to pinpoint the timing and approximate location of the shots fired that night, the sources said. The information was provided to authorities three days after the shooting. The details have not been officially released pending the completion of the investigation.

The probe should be complete in the coming weeks, the sources said.

Police officials and a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office declined to comment on the findings, citing the ongoing investigation. Haskel and Clay remain on leave while the probe continues.

ShotSpotter was installed to help police track gun violence and catch the shooters, relying upon the sensors and Global Positioning System tracking. D.C. police obtained the system with help from the [FBI](#) and operates it in consultation with ShotSpotter Inc.

The ShotSpotter analysis indicated that the first shot came from the location where DeOnté had allegedly been on the minibike and that subsequent shots came from the general area where Haskel and Clay had been sitting in Haskel's parked SUV, the sources said.

The weapons, though not precisely identified by ShotSpotter technology, made distinctly different sounds, with Haskel's 9mm being the quieter of the two, the sources said.

ShotSpotter's ability to track gunshots can be impaired by unusual topography or high-rise buildings. But the sources said no questions have emerged about its reliability in determining the sequence of gunfire in a scenario such as the shooting of DeOnté.

Big-city police chiefs say ShotSpotter not only alerts police to gun battles but also helps them piece together some perplexing crime puzzles. The technology is operating in 17 cities, including [San Francisco](#), [Newark](#) and [Charleston, S.C.](#), and is being installed in seven more.

The FBI, which purchased the ShotSpotter sensors as a pilot project for the District, considers the technology so reliable that it has bought two more systems for cities plagued by violent crime and has plans to buy systems for other cities.

ShotSpotter spokesman Gregg Rowland said he could not discuss the details of the company's report in the Rawlings case. But he said the sensors provide an "important piece of the puzzle" for any investigation.

"We're like a live witness on the scene with very good eyes and ears," Rowland said. "Most police officers will match up our information with shell casings on the ground and any eyewitness testimony. When you add up A plus B plus C plus D, you can come to some conclusions."

*Staff writers Allison Klein and Allan Lengel contributed to this report.*