Police Kill Driver, 13, at End of Chase

The auto-theft suspect reportedly was backing up toward an LAPD officer, who fired 10 shots into the car.

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A Los Angeles police officer shot and killed an unarmed 13-year-old auto-theft suspect in South Los Angeles on Sunday morning as the boy was backing the car toward him, authorities said.

Los Angeles Police Department officials did not release the names of the suspect or officer involved in the shooting, which occurred shortly before 4 a.m. at West 83rd Street and South Western Avenue.

A number of other details about the case were not made public as the LAPD internal affairs unit began its investigation into whether the officer's actions were in line with department policy. Police did say that the officer fired 10 shots into the car. Deputy Chief Michael Berkow said the suspect was not armed.

The boy had refused to pull over when confronted by officers who thought they had come across a drunk driver, police said. That prompted a three-minute chase through South Los Angeles that ended when the boy drove the 1990 Toyota Camry onto a curb, police said.

A 14-year-old passenger jumped out of the car before the shooting and tried to run away. He was arrested on suspicion of grand theft auto.

The slaying occurred nearly a year after LAPD officers fatally shot another fleeing motorist as he backed his car toward police at the end of a widely televised, 90-minute chase. That incident, which occurred near Santa Monica High School, prompted Police Chief William J. Bratton to announce in March that the department should place new restrictions on officers' ability to fire at moving vehicles.

Bratton said that a new policy should prohibit officers from shooting at people in vehicles "unless the officer or other person are threatened by deadly force, other than the moving vehicle."

A proposal to tighten the policy has been formulated since then but has not been considered for adoption by the Police Commission. David Cunningham, the commission's president, said the
group probably would decide whether to adopt the change in the next 30 days.

Bratton could not be reached for comment Sunday. But LAPD Assistant Chief Jim McDonnell said the proposal would make exceptions for officers whose lives were threatened by a suspect's car.

Cunningham visited the site of the shooting Sunday afternoon, and said the police cruiser was badly dented and scratched, apparently from the impact of the stolen car.

Cunningham was reluctant to comment on a case under investigation, since he said it was the commission that ultimately would determine whether the shooting was justified.

"It's a tough one," he said. "I think what does make it truly a tragedy is that the decedent is so young."

In a news release, police gave an account of the pursuit and confrontation.

Two officers in a patrol car first noticed the Toyota when it ran a red light on Gage Avenue and the Harbor Freeway. They also noticed that it was accelerating and decelerating erratically, and weaving from lane to lane. They followed the car onto the freeway and turned on their flashing lights and siren. When the driver kept moving, they tried warning him using their public address system.

They followed the car for more than three miles until it skidded onto the curbside at Western Avenue and 83rd Street.

After the passenger jumped out of the Toyota, the driver backed into the police car. An officer fired 10 shots into the car. The news release did not indicate where the officer was when he fired the shots, but it did say the passenger door of the patrol car was open.

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Times staff writer Andrew Blankstein contributed to this report.