

**COUNTY OF SUFFOLK
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**



**THOMAS J. SPOTA
DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

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Ex-con pulls gun during East End Drug Task Force search for illegal narcotics

A Town of Riverhead ex-convict with a violent past and an extensive criminal history has been admitted to the psychiatric unit of University Hospital in Stony Brook following a shooting incident that occurred in his home Tuesday night while officers assigned to the East End Drug Task Force searched his residence for illegal drugs.

Thomas Michael Counihan, 60, of Wading River-Manor Road in Wading River, currently on probation for a drug possession charge, displayed a loaded Colt .45 while the investigators searched his room Tuesday evening for illegal narcotics. Counihan grabbed his weapon from top of his bed and first pointed the gun barrel at his face, then his chest. The suspect then began to turn the gun toward the two officers. It was at that point one of the officers fired one shot at Counihan, missing him but prompting the suspect to drop to the floor. Both detectives then subdued Counihan and seized his loaded handgun.

In Counihan's room, the officers found and seized 250 packets of heroin, approximately two ounces of powder cocaine, a large plastic bag containing marijuana, a syringe and nine unlabeled prescription bottles containing various pills.

"It is clear the police officer's discharge of his weapon, given the circumstances, was justified," said Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota.

District Attorney Spota said when Counihan is released from the hospital, he will be charged with criminal possession of a loaded handgun, and possession of heroin, cocaine and marijuana.

"We are relieved that the two East End Drug Task Force officers were not injured during the standoff with this dangerous, violent felon."

Counihan's criminal history includes six convictions, four on felony charges, including a violent felony conviction in 1985 for a Southampton Village robbery in which Counihan used a deadly weapon.

The East End Drug Task Force is a multi-jurisdictional drug enforcement unit funded by the office of Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota. The task force includes detectives, police officers and law enforcement personnel from the New York State Police, Suffolk County Police Department, Suffolk County Sheriff's Office, Suffolk County Department of Probation, Southampton Town Police Department, Riverhead Police Department, East Hampton Town Police Department, Easthampton Village Police Department, Southampton Village Police Department, Sag Harbor Village Police Department, Southold Police Department and Suffolk County District Attorney Investigators.

SCDA COMMUNICATIONS

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Defendants are entitled to a fair trial with the burden on the government to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.