

## Willamette Week

### Protest Emails Between Portland Police and Homeland Security: “It’s a Riot”

Emails from "Operation Columbia Crest" show law-enforcement agencies prepared for a crackdown by discussing rumors of Molotov cocktails.

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Emails newly released to a national news outlet show that as Portland police forcefully pushed antifascist and anarchist protesters out of downtown parks last month, they exchanged emails with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security describing the protest in harsh terms.

"It's a riot," one law enforcement official wrote—a term that police did not use with the public as multiple agencies tried to prevent violence between right-wing and left-wing protesters during dueling rallies.

The emails were obtained by journalism website Muckrock and published July 5. They contain snippets of new information about how law-enforcement agencies coordinated a response to protests in the wake of a May double slaying on a Portland MAX train.

The emails, released to Muckrock under a federal records request, are heavily redacted—so redacted that it's impossible to tell which agency wrote each email. But they reveal a few new facts about how closely Portland police worked closely with state and federal law enforcement agencies, including Oregon State Police, the FBI and Homeland Security.

The agencies called the joint effort "Operation Columbia Crest."

In the emails, officials count the protesters present at several locations in downtown Portland—but pay especially close attention to the anarchists and antifascist groups in Chapman and Lowndale plazas, describing them as "anticipated to have potential for violence."

At least part of that supposed potential is described in the emails, which describe two Molotov cocktails seized in the parks. The emails cite "open source reporting" to describe the Molotov cocktails, and includes a link to a KATU-TV report.

No independent confirmation of Molotov cocktails has been produced in the wake of the protests. The KATU story now contains no mention of them.

Portland Police spokesman Sgt. Pete Simpson did not respond to WW's questions about the Molotov cocktail report.

It appears law enforcement officers used the rumors of Molotov cocktails as partial justification for declaring the left-wing protest a riot. But the emails also describe other threats that have more evidence.

The emails say that people in both the "alt-right" protest in Terry Shrunken Plaza and the left-wing counterprotesters came armed with weapons like clubs, bats, and at least one boxcutter, which officials tried to confiscate. A few scuffles early in the protest resulted in a total of three arrests recorded in the emails.

But then antifascists and other counterprotesters began firing marbles and rocks from slingshots at police lines. Some fighting broke out among protesters. A "sizable group of black bloc with clubs and other weapons" gathered at Chapman Square, says an email sent at 3:20 pm.

Thirteen minutes later, an official whose name is redacted declared: "It's a riot."