

CORONER REPORT
Santa Barbara County Sheriff

19-11424

Supplement No
ORIG



4434 Calle Real
 Santa Barbara, CA 93110-1002
 Report Type
CORONER

Reported Date
05/02/2019

Officer
HENSLIN, T

(805) 681-4100

Administrative Information																				
Agency	Santa Barbara County Sheriff			Report No	19-11424		Supplement No	ORIG		Reported Date	05/02/2019		Reported Time	03:32		Status	Incident			
Report Type	Coroner's investigation			Location	PLATTS HARBOR SANTA CRUZ ISLAND															
City	Santa Barbara City		ZIP Code	95060		Rep Dist	101		Area	1		Beat	10		From Date	05/02/2019		From Time	03:32	
Officer	2718/HENSLIN, T			Assignment	CORONER BUREAU			Entered by	2718		Assignment	CORONER BUREAU								
RMS Transfer	Pending			Report Title	CORONER REPORT			Approving Officer	3768		Approval Date	02/21/2020								
Approval Time	14:24:08																			
Cause of death (COR only)	SMOKE INHALATION			Due to (COR only)	BOAT FIRE			Manner of death (COR only)	ACCIDENT			Date/Time of death pronounced	09-05-19/0443 HRS							
Date/Time body found	09-05-19/0443 HRS			Determined by (COR only)	INVESTIGATION			Dr. will sign	N			Hospitalization	N							
Mortuary	CORONER'S BUREAU			Removal Status	CALL OUT			Date/Time NOK notified	09-05-19/1301 HRS			NOK notified by:	DET NUNEZ							
VOK notified via	TELEPHONE			NOK relation to decedent	[REDACTED]															
Person Summary																				
Inv	Invl No	Type	Name			MNI	Race	Sex	DOB											
COR	1	I	DIGNAM, JUSTIN CARROLL			987631	W	M	[REDACTED]											
Summary Narrative																				
he decedent died as a result of a boat fire located at Platts Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, Santa Barbara Ca. The e is being investigated by the Unites States Coast Guard, FBI and ATF. The death investigation is being onducted by the Santa Barbara Coroner's Bureau. The manner death is being certified as an ACCIDENT.																				

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Decedent - Coroner Investigation 1: DIGNAM, JUSTIN CARROLL

Involvement Decedent - Coroner Investigation		Invl No 1	Type Individual				
Name DIGNAM, JUSTIN CARROLL		MNI 987631	Race White	Sex Male	DOB [REDACTED]	Age 58	Juvenile? No
Height 6'00"	Weight 225#	Hair Color Brown	Eye Color Blue				
Type Home	Address [REDACTED]			City [REDACTED]	State [REDACTED]		
ZIP Code [REDACTED]	Date [REDACTED]						
Type Operator License	ID No [REDACTED]		OLS California				
Type Social Security Number	ID No [REDACTED]						
Phone Type [REDACTED]	Phone No [REDACTED]	Date [REDACTED]					
Relationship [REDACTED]	Name [REDACTED]	Race [REDACTED]	Sex [REDACTED]				
Address [REDACTED]		City [REDACTED]	State [REDACTED]	ZIP Code [REDACTED]			
Phone Type [REDACTED]	Phone No [REDACTED]						
Relationship [REDACTED]	Name [REDACTED]	Race [REDACTED]	Sex [REDACTED]				
Address [REDACTED]		City [REDACTED]	State [REDACTED]				
ZIP Code [REDACTED]	Phone Type [REDACTED]	Phone No [REDACTED]					
Relationship [REDACTED]	Name [REDACTED]	Race [REDACTED]	Sex [REDACTED]	DOB [REDACTED]			
Address [REDACTED]		City [REDACTED]	State [REDACTED]				
ZIP Code [REDACTED]	Phone Type [REDACTED]	Phone No [REDACTED]					

Medical						
Citizenship ISA		Place of Birth New York	Occupation OWNER	Coroner Case No 19-11424	NOK Notified? Yes	
Remise Sealed? No	Property? No	Vehicle? No	Legal Document No	Other Documents? No	Other Agency USCG	
Officer ILGENFELD		OA Case No ---	NOK Name [REDACTED]			
On Call? No		Family Request? Yes	Other? No			
Cause of Illness /A						
Injury Place FAST		Injury Date 09/02/2019	Injury Time 03:30:00	Injured At Work? No		
Injury Premise WATTS HARBOR SANTA CRUZ ISLAND SANTA BARBARA CA						
Injury Injured FAST FIRE						
Decedent Driver No	Decedent Passenger Yes	Decedent Pedestrian No				

arrative
 ntinuations:
 tin Dignam is the decedent.

rative:
 09-02-19, at approximately 0516 hours, the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office was notified by the Ventura Fire Department of a vessel on fire in the Channel Islands off the coast of Santa Barbara County. The Coast Guard responded along with Ventura Fire Department and Santa Barbara County Fire Department. Upon arrival at the vessel was found to be fully engulfed in fire. The call had originally come into the Coast Guard at 0332

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hours, on 09-02-19.

Reports to the Coast Guard said there were possibly be 34 subjects trapped below the water line, in the vessel.

The vessel was identified as the "Conception" and it was in jurisdiction of the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office near Santa Cruz Island, not in Ventura Sheriff's Department jurisdiction. The location was later found to be 300 yards off shore of Platts Harbor on Santa Cruz Island. See Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department case number 19-11415 for full details.

Sgt. Morris was notified of the incident by Sergeant Valencia. Sergeant Morris requested the response of Detective Henslin, Detective Biedinger, and Detective Carlson to the Coroner's Bureau to assist in the incident at approximately 0525 hours.

Detective Baisa was also called at that time and asked to respond to Ventura Harbor to act as the liaison for the Sheriff's Office.

It was later found the vessel, the "Conception" contained 33 passengers and six crew members. Five of the crew members were rescued, but none of the 33 passengers had been found.

During the course of the morning four deceased passengers had been located by Coast Guard personnel. The Coast Guard transported the decedents to the Santa Barbara Harbor.

At 1150 hours, on 09-02-19, Sgt. Morris, Detective Henslin and Detective Biedinger responded to the Santa Barbara Harbor to retrieve decedents documented as 1 through 4.

At 1220 hours, on 09-02-19, the decedents were brought to Santa Barbara Harbor. Detective Henslin and Detective Biedinger transported two decedent's each to the Santa Barbara Coroner's Bureau, where physical examinations were later conducted on them.

At that time digital photographs were taken of the decedents along with samples collected for DNA analysis identification and for an expanded toxicology panel. All of the decedents retrieved on 09-02-19, were found to have significant thermal burns to their bodies with limbs missing due to the intensity of the fire. None of the decedents could be identified by physical characteristics.

At 2030 hours, on 09-02-19, Sgt Morris, Det. Biedinger, Det. Henslin, Det. Carlson, Det. Baisa, Deputy Bruening and staff from the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office responded to the Santa Barbara Harbor for retrieval of 16 additional bodies recovered from the Conception, documented as decedents 5 through 20.

The decedents were then transported to Coroner's Bureau for examinations, drawing of fluids for toxicology and DNA analysis, and collection of personal property.

At approximately 2330 hours, on 09-02-19, all the examinations of the decedents were completed and the decedents were placed in a portable morgue provided by the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office.

On 09-03-19, at 1930 hours, Sgt Morris, Det. Biedinger, Det. Henslin, Det. Carlson, Det. Baisa, Deputy Bruening and staff from the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office responded to the Santa Barbara Harbor for retrieval of 13 more remains recovered from the Conception, documented as decedents 21 through 33.

The decedents were then all transported to the Santa Barbara Coroner's Bureau, where physical examinations, digital photographs, and fluid samples for DNA analysis and toxicology where conducted on each recovered decedent.

All of the decedents recovered on 09-03-19 were placed on portable coroner racks and secured in the Santa Barbara Coroner's Bureau morgue.

On 09-09-19, at approximately 1400 hours, Pathologist Dr. Manny Montez, Detective Henslin, Detective Baisa, and Sgt. Morris, along with representatives from the FBI and ATF performed tracheal examinations of the remaining decedents at the Coroner's Bureau.

On 09-10-19, at approximately 1830 hours, Detective Baisa met with Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department Sgt. Nelson,

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718/HENSLIN, T

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at the National Park Service, 1901 Spinnaker Drive in Ventura, Ca. Sgt. Nelson provided Detective Baisa with a bag of suspected human flesh, a backpack and an air vent from the Conception that had suspected human hair embedded in it. The suspected human tissue and other items were found in the bow of the Conception.

The items later numbered 35 and 36 were transported to the Santa Barbara Coroner's Bureau where digital photographs were taken of the suspected human tissue and suspected human hair, which was removed from the vessel air vent.

The suspected human tissue and hair were later flown to the Sacramento County Coroner's Office in Sacramento, Ca., under the care of Sgt. Morris and Deputy Bruening for DNA analysis.

At approximately 1330 hours, on 09-11-19, Detective Henslin and Detective Biedinger responded to Santa Barbara Harbor, after Divers from the Los Angeles Police Department located the remains of a decedent, near the location of the Conception fire. The Los Angeles Police Department collected the remains, with a section of hair, documented as numbers 37 and 38.

The decedent and the remains were then transported to the Santa Barbara Coroner's Bureau, where a physical examination, digital photographs, and fluid samples for DNA analysis and toxicology were conducted on the recovered decedent.

The sample of collected hair was packaged and sent along the DNA samples of decedent number 37 for DNA analysis in Sacramento California, under the care of Detective Henslin, who flew to the Sacramento Airport and provided the samples to Sgt. Morris who was still in Sacramento.

The samples were then taken to the Sacramento County Coroner's Office, for DNA analysis.

Physical evidence:

A series of digital photographs were taken of the decedent at the Coroner's Bureau by Forensic Personnel from the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department. The photo card was later downloaded for storage at the Coroner's Bureau.

Identification of decedent:

The decedent was positively identified by a DNA comparison, with samples submitted by the Chandler Dignam the decedent's son. The DNA comparison was conducted via the Sacramento County Coroner's Office.

Examination of decedent:

The decedent was received at the Coroner's Bureau inside two body bags, the inner bag was black in color and outer bag blue in color. He was noted to be lying on his right side with his arms bent inwards at the elbows, toward his chest. He was wearing what appeared to be dark color shorts and possibly remnants of a shirt. Red plaid slippers were visible upon both of the decedent's feet. Numerous wires and possibly thin rope was entangled around the decedent's remains. All exposed bones on the decedent were discolored and either white or black in color charring. Indicating exposure to intense fire for different periods of time.

Head:

Severe thermal burns and fractures were visible upon the face and head.
The top of the head was missing, exposing the brain, with severe thermal burns about the entire skull.
The underlying fatty tissue and bone structure was exposed as well as the decedent's teeth which was extremely charred and discolored.
No indications of foul play were noted to the decedent's face or skull.
Both eyes were severely damaged fire.
Due to the severity of the thermal burns, the decedent's facial features could not be determined therefore DNA was used to identify him.

Upper Torso:

The entire upper torso (Chest, abdomen) sustained severe thermal burns.
Exposed underlying muscle, and skeletal frame was visible.
Some internal organs were partially exposed in the abdomen area.

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Arms:

- The left arm was noted to be bent at the elbow towards the chest in a pugilistic position.
- The left arm sustained severe thermal burns which caused the decedent's right hand to fracture and partially detach, bending to the rear of the forearm.
- The underlying muscle tissue and fibers were visible as well as the underlying fatty tissue.
- The right arm was bent at the elbow and sustained severe thermal burns, exposing the underlying muscle and fatty tissue.
- The right hand was missing.

Legs:

- Both legs were bent in a pugilistic position, bent at the waist and knee areas.
- Thermal burns were visible upon both legs from the upper area to the feet.
- The left leg had different stages of thermal burns starting from the upper section to the foot.
- The burns ranged from second to the most severe thermal burns.
- Multiple skin splits exposing the underlying fatty tissue and muscle were noted to the mid-thigh down.
- The right leg sustained the same amount of thermal burns as the left leg, also exposing underlying fatty tissue and muscle.
- Multiple skin splits and charring was visible.

Back:

- Black color charring and redness was visible on the entire back of the decedent.
- No skin splits were noted.

Post mortem examination:

Due to the severity of the decedent's thermal injuries, along with the circumstances regarding the incident, regarding the vessel he was on becoming ignited, a post mortem examination was deferred.

Statements:

I made telephone contact with the decedent's wife regarding the incident and the Coroner's Role in the investigation into the cause and manner of death for the decedent. I provided her with contact information regarding the fire investigation part of the incident. The decedent's wife eventually made funeral arrangements with Hilgenfeld.

Once the decedent's death certificate was completed, I again contacted the decedent's wife to explain the death certificate and answer any questions she had.

Forensic toxicology:

On 09/02/19, toxicology samples were obtained from the decedent to include two vials of femoral blood and one vial of vitreous humor. One vial of femoral blood was submitted to Alere Forensics for testing. The remaining vial was retained at the Coroner's Bureau pending the need for further testing.

On 09/12/19, a toxicology report was received from Alere Forensics regarding the decedent's carbon monoxide saturation. The report indicated the following:

Carbon monoxide 68 % saturation

On 09/13/19, a toxicology report was received from Alere Forensics regarding the decedent's cyanide saturation. The report indicated the following:

None detected

On 09/28/19, a toxicology report was received from Alere Forensics regarding the decedent. The report indicated the following:

Positive findings:

None Detected

Copies of these reports was reviewed with Dr. Manny Montez and found the Carbon Monoxide to be contributive to the decedent's death. The other toxicology results were non-contributory to the decedent's death.

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Consultations with Forensic Pathologist:

I reviewed the circumstance surrounding this death with Dr. Manny Montez. Dr. Montez opined that the decedent died as a result of SMOKE INHALATION due to BOAT FIRE.

In review of the circumstances of this death:

On 09-02-19, at approximately 0443 hours, 58-year-old, Justin Dignam died from smoke inhalation when the vessel she was on, for a diving expedition, caught fire.

Cause of Death:

It was determined that the decedent (Justin Dignam) died as a result of the following cause;

SMOKE INHALATION (Mins)

Due to:

BOAT FIRE (Mins)

With other significant conditions:

None

Manner of death:

The manner of death will be certified by the Office of the Coroner as:

ACCIDENT

Final Disposition:

The decedent was released to representatives of Hilgenfeld. Any property that was found to be related the decedent was turned over to the FBI Victim Specialist Unit.

Case closed.



2019-003228-0002

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lauren J. Marinetti".

Laureen J. Marinetti, Ph.D., F-ABFT
Laboratory Director

Date of Report: September 12, 2019

Alere Forensics at Redwood Toxicology is accredited by The American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) and is recognized by the State of California as a Title 17 Forensic Alcohol Laboratory.

All samples, including the sample packaging, will be retained at the laboratory for one year after the date of report. After one year, the samples and packaging will be destroyed unless the client requests that the samples be returned or an alternate retention policy has been set up with the laboratory. The laboratory cannot ship controlled substances.

Comments

None



ALERE FORENSICS AT REDWOOD TOXICOLOGY LABORATORY

3650 Westwind Blvd. Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Phone 866-584-0887 FAX 707-703-1319

Agency # 19-11424

FORENSIC LABORATORY REPORT

AF # 2019-003228

To: Brice Bruening
Santa Barbara County Sheriff-Coroner

Sample Collection Date: September 2, 2019

Decedent: Justin Dignam

The following evidence was submitted to the Laboratory by a representative of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff-Coroner on 9/5/2019 via FedEx:

Submission 01: One tape sealed and initialed screw top metal canister containing a second screw top metal canister containing one tube of blood with paperwork marked in part "#6 Doe John" The name "Dignam, Justin" was supplied on 9-9-19.

Item # 01-A: One gray top tube with approximately 10 mL of peripheral blood collected at 2330 hours.

Service Request:

FP222B - Expanded Pnl (Confirm) - Blood



2019-003228-0001

Drug Screen Results - ELISA

<u>Drug Screen Classification</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Limit of Detection</u>
Amphetamine	Not Detected	20.0 ng/mL
Barbiturates	Not Detected	1.0 mcg/mL
Benzodiazepines	Not Detected	25.0 ng/mL
Buprenorphine	Not Detected	1.0 ng/mL
Carisoprodol	Not Detected	500.0 ng/mL
Cocaine Metabolite	Not Detected	50.0 ng/mL
Fentanyl	Not Detected	1.0 ng/mL
Marijuana Metabolite	Not Detected	10.0 ng/mL
Methadone	Not Detected	25.0 ng/mL
Methamphetamine	Not Detected	20.0 ng/mL
Opiates	Not Detected	10.0 ng/mL
Oxycodone \ Oxymorphone	Not Detected	5.0 ng/mL
PCP	Not Detected	5.0 ng/mL
Tramadol	Not Detected	50.0 ng/mL
Zolpidem	Not Detected	5.0 ng/mL

Confirmation/Screen Results

<u>Analyte Name</u>	<u>Concentration</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>Sample Type</u>
Basic Drug Screen	None Detected	LC-MS-MS	Blood
Volatiles (EtOH, IPA, MeOH, Acetone)	Not Detected	GC-Headspace	Blood



Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lauren J. Marinetti".

Lauren J. Marinetti, Ph.D., F-ABFT
Laboratory Director

Date of Report: September 28, 2019

Alere Forensics at Redwood Toxicology is accredited by The American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) and is recognized by the State of California as a Title 17 Forensic Alcohol Laboratory.

All samples, including the sample packaging, will be retained at the laboratory for one year after the date of report. After one year, the samples and packaging will be destroyed unless the client requests that the samples be returned or an alternate retention policy has been set up with the laboratory. The laboratory cannot ship controlled substances.

Comments

EtOH - ethanol, IPA - isopropanol, MeOH - methanol



ALERE FORENSICS AT REDWOOD TOXICOLOGY LABORATORY

3650 Westwind Blvd. Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Phone 866-584-0887 FAX 707-703-1319

Agency # 19-11424

FORENSIC LABORATORY REPORT

AF # 2019-003228

To: Brice Bruening
Santa Barbara County Sheriff-Coroner

Sample Collection Date: September 2, 2019

Decedent: Justin Dignam

The following evidence was submitted to the Laboratory by a representative of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff-Coroner on 9/5/2019 via FedEx:

Submission 01: One tape sealed and initialed screw top metal canister containing a second screw top metal canister containing one tube of blood with paperwork marked in part "#6 Doe John" The name "Dignam, Justin" was supplied on 9-9-19.

Item # 01-A: One gray top tube with approximately 10 mL of peripheral blood collected at 2330 hours.

Service Request:

FP760B - Carboxyhemoglobin/Carbon Monoxide - Blood

Confirmation/Screen Results

Analyte Name	Concentration	Method	Sample Type
Carbon Monoxide	68 %	AVOXimeter 4000	Blood



2019-003228-0002

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lauren J. Marinetti".

Lauren J. Marinetti, Ph.D., F-ABFT
Laboratory Director

Date of Report: September 12, 2019

Alera Forensics at Redwood Toxicology is accredited by The American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) and is recognized by the State of California as a Title 17 Forensic Alcohol Laboratory.

All samples, including the sample packaging, will be retained at the laboratory for one year after the date of report. After one year, the samples and packaging will be destroyed unless the client requests that the samples be returned or an alternate retention policy has been set up with the laboratory. The laboratory cannot ship controlled substances.

Comments

None