



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Richard W. Robinson
Chief Executive Officer

Patricia Hill Thomas
Chief Operations Officer/
Assistant Executive Officer

Monica Nino-Reid
Assistant Executive Officer

Stan Risen
Assistant Executive Officer

1010 10th Street, Suite 6800, Modesto, CA 95354
P.O. Box 3404, Modesto, CA 95353-3404

Phone: 209.525.6333 Fax: 209.525.4033

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Contact: Phoebe Leung
(209) 558-6833

Heat-related death announced in Stanislaus County

Stanislaus County, CA – The Stanislaus County Sheriff’s Coroner’s Office has announced the death of a 91-year old woman due to heat stroke.

The cause of death for Margaret Mierzejewski, was attributed to heat stroke after an autopsy was performed at the Sheriff’s Coroner’s office.

On July 10, 2008 at 6:00 a.m. the Stanislaus County Sheriff’s Coroner’s Office was notified of a death in a residence of an elderly female. After the initial death investigation it was determined that an inquiry by the coroner was necessary to rule in or out evidence of a possible heat related death.

After the preliminary investigation the coroner determined that the death was heat related. The ambient temperature in the residence yesterday was estimated at 108 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature this morning in the residence was 85 degrees Fahrenheit and the core temperature of the decedent was 104.7 degrees Fahrenheit. After reviewing the symptoms and information pertaining to the case with the forensic pathologist it was determined that an autopsy was necessary to rule out any other contributing factor to death. As a result of the autopsy the official cause of death is “heat stroke.”

Symptoms and signs of heat stroke are headache, vertigo, and fatigue, followed by a loss of consciousness. “Heat stroke is a life-threatening emergency,” Kristi Ah You, Chief Deputy Coroner. “Unless promptly and energetically treated, it can result in death.”

“We are grieved by this loss, especially when we have been focusing on our senior citizens,” stated Dr. John Walker, Public Health Officer of Stanislaus County.

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“In our work with our partners during this past week, we have looked particularly to the senior centers for heat respite,” Walker continued.

People should recognize the symptoms of any heat-related illness and take precautions to stay safe and healthy. Senior citizens are particularly vulnerable.

Heat waves can be especially dangerous for seniors, infants and other vulnerable people. These individuals have a much harder time regulating their body temperatures and adjusting to extreme changes in heat.

The National Weather Service projects temperatures to return to their seasonal norms starting Friday, but people need to continue to take precautions during the hot weather.

During times of extreme heat, if you notice the following symptoms, seek medical help quickly:

- Red, hot, dry skin
- High body temperature of 105 degrees
- Dizziness, Nausea, Confusion
- Profuse sweating and muscle cramping
- Strange behavior or unconsciousness
- Rapid pulse or throbbing headache

People should follow these steps to stay safe and protect themselves during hot weather.

- Stay indoors in and out of the sun during the day.
- Use air conditioner and keep it well maintained.
- If indoor temperature remains above 90 degrees, seek shelter in an air conditioned building.
- Drink plenty of water, and eat lighter meals.
- Avoid alcoholic or caffeinated drinks.
- Wear lightweight, loose fitting clothing.
- Take frequent cool showers or baths.
- Check in on neighbors, relatives and friends, particularly the elderly who may be isolated.
- Bring pets indoors where the air conditioning is on.

For heat-related information, Stanislaus County has numerous resources available for the public at www.StanEmergency.com and on its heat hotline at (209) 558-8035.

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