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Gunnison Colorado - Student Commits Suicide Using Cyanide - Hazmat Emergency Declared

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Every law enforcement and emergency services agency in Gunnison was called into action Tuesday night, as two separate incidents had officials scrambling and residents wondering what all of the commotion was about

One of those incidents resulted in a condominium being declared a hazardous materials emergency, sending nine individuals who were feared to have been contaminated with a dangerous chemical to Gunnison Valley Hospital.

Both incidents were related to despondent individuals, one of whom was threatening to take his own life and another, a 22-year-old Western State College student, who was found deceased apparently by his own hand.

The chaos began late Tuesday afternoon, when officers were dispatched to the 1000 block of W. Denver for a possible suicide. There, they found an individual who had apparently been dead for several hours.

Gunnison County Coroner Frank Vader identified the man as Stephen Watson, who originally hailed from the Denver area and had been living in Gunnison to attend WSC though he was not presently enrolled.

According to several law enforcement and eye-witness accounts, it appears as if Watson ingested a mixture of potassium cyanide, a highly toxic inorganic compound used primarily in gold mining. There was a bottle of the substance on a table and a note, according to one source at the scene, warning others about the lethal concoction.

Officials were quickly advised to vacate the premises while a Hazardous Materials unit could respond.

The biggest concern, according to Gunnison County Emergency Services Coordinator Scott Morrill, was if the potassium cyanide had "aerosolized."

According to him, the substance is highly reactive and can easily change to hydrogen cyanide, "which is what they used in gas chambers," Morrill explained.

"Had it aerosolized, we would have had huge issues," he said.

Officials didn't believe that to be the case. Still, they agreed to err on the side of caution.

Five law enforcement officials and four individuals who had entered the home prior to police arrival were transported to GVH for a "decontamination" proceeding. None showed signs of illness and after a few hours of monitoring all were released. Residents in the nearest condos, which were in one of four buildings in the complex, were evacuated. A school bus was brought to the scene to house people while the situation was sorted out.

The residents were allowed back into their homes around 9 p.m. The precaution did take five on-duty officers out of rotation.

Source

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