



SANTA CRUZ POLICE DEPARTMENT
155 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

MEDIA RELEASE



Incident

DATE/TIME: January 5, 2016 @ 6:49 p.m.

LOCATION: 100 Block of Chestnut Street

TOPIC: Update #2 Identities Released Homicide - Suicide Investigation

CASE NUMBER: 16S-00114

INFORMATION:

UPDATE #2

Santa Cruz Police Detectives continue their work on the double shooting discovered at an apartment in the 100 block Chestnut Street on January 5, 2016. This case is being handled as a murder-suicide.

The female victim is now being identified as Cherish Villapia, age 22, from Iowa. Cherish Villapia is the sister-in-law of the suspect. She was visiting the household over the holidays. The male suspect is identified as Howard Atkinson, age 35, resided in the apartment. Howard Atkinson recently moved to Santa Cruz from Texas. The victim and the suspect were not in a relationship. The suspect, Howard Atkinson, was married to the victim's sister.

The suspect and victim were pronounced dead at the scene. Each suffered a single gunshot wound. A handgun was recovered near the bodies. The history of the ownership of the gun is being researched by SCPD Detectives working with ATF.

Santa Cruz Police Investigators have a working theory for the motive behind the homicide-suicide. The confirmation of those details is pending autopsy and forensic lab results.

UPDATE #1

Santa Cruz Police Detectives are continuing follow up investigation in the suspicious deaths discovered at an apartment on January 5th in the 100 block of Chestnut Street. Detectives believe this case is the result of a homicide followed by a suicide. Evidence recovered at the scene indicates the adult male shot and killed the female before turning the gun on himself. Forensic tests and an autopsy are pending to confirm this information. One handgun was located and recovered at the scene.

Detectives have identified the deceased. The victim is the sister-in-law of the suspect. The names of the suspect and victim are being withheld pending notification of family.

There is no information to indicate that this was a random event or that there is any ongoing danger to the public. There are no outstanding suspects related to this incident.

Additional information will continue to be released as it becomes available.

Initial Release

On Tuesday January 5, 2016 at 6:49 p.m., Santa Cruz Police responded to second story apartment in the 100 block of Chestnut Street on a report of suspicious circumstances. The initial call for the welfare check indicated that a man and a woman had been locked inside a room in the apartment for an extended period of time. Neither person answered phone calls from a concerned relative.

Officers discovered the two deceased from apparent gunshot wounds. The deceased male is 35 years old from Santa Cruz and the deceased female is 23 years old visiting from out of the area.

Identification of the deceased is pending notification of family.

For additional information, contact: Joyce Blaschke

Phone: (831) 420-5844

Anonymous tips can also be sent to the police department through our Tip Line (831) 420-5995, or from our Website; www.santacruzpolice.com . Tipsters can also submit an anonymous tip via our smartphone app or from an SMS text. Visit our Website for instructions.