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Autistic man dies, left alone in hot van for hours

Inquirer Staff Report

By Trish Wilson and Julia Terruso

Bucks County officials are investigating the death of a severely autistic man who had been left alone in a van after a trip to Sesame Place on Saturday, when an excessive heat watch was in effect.

Bucks County Coroner Dr. Joseph Campbell said today that Bryan Nevins, 20, a resident of Woods Services in Middletown Township, died of hyperthermia after being left alone in the van for five hours.

"With the temperatures Saturday, in a closed vehicle, it probably reached 125 or 130 degrees in an hour," he said.

Campbell said he estimated Nevins, originally from Oceanside, N.Y., died within an hour to 90 minutes.

The manner of death is listed as accidental, he said.

Two unidentified staff members have been suspended.

Nevins was one of four Woods Services residents who had visited Sesame Place with two residential counselors. They returned from the theme park about noon, police said. One counselor got off with two of the residents and the driver continued to another building where Nevins and the other resident lived.

The driver returned the van, dropped off the keys, and left about 3 p.m. at the end of her work shift. At 4 p.m., a nurse looked for Nevins to give him medication. When she couldn't find him the staff conducted a room-to-room search.

Nevins was found about 5:35 p.m. lying down on the van's rear seat.

A spokeswoman for Woods Services said they were offering counseling to residents and staff.

"The tragic incident that occurred at Woods Services this past weekend is heart wrenching and devastating," said Cheryl Kauffman in a statement. "We are deeply pained for the Nevins family."

She said Woods Service officials are cooperating with an investigation conducted by Middletown Township police and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.