

Electric shock in pool kills man, injures 5 kids

Rosalie Murphy, The Desert Sun 9:08 p.m. PDT March 28, 2016

A father is dead and his daughter is hospitalized in critical condition after suffering an electric shock in a Palm Springs pool on Easter Sunday, police said Monday.

At about 4 p.m. Sunday, Palm Springs police officers and firefighters were called to a home in the 2300 block of Yosemite Drive, in the Indian Canyons neighborhood. Upon arrival, emergency personnel found relatives performing CPR on a 43-year-old man and a 9-year-old girl, who authorities identified as the man's daughter.

A caller to 911 reported that people were "turning blue after jumping into the pool," according to police. Investigators believe the man jumped into the pool to try to save his daughter. Both suffered electric shocks, which, according to a preliminary investigation, may have been the result of faulty pool wiring, officials said.

Police Sgt. William Hutchinson said victims described a "tingling feeling" while in the pool and that faulty wires may have been connected to a light.

Hutchinson, however, cautioned that an investigation is ongoing and officials have not reached final conclusions as to what caused the water to become electrified.

The man was pronounced dead at Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs on Sunday.

Late Monday, the Riverside County coroner's office identified the man as James Tramel, 43, of Burlingame, Calif.

The 9-year-old girl remained in critical condition Monday at Loma Linda Medical Center, according to police.

No one answered the door at the victims' house on Monday evening.

A neighbor said the family lives in the San Francisco Bay area and visits the house, which has been in their family for generations, about twice a year.

"They were lovely people," said Scott Van Dyke, who lives next door. "He was a loving husband, with kids and a wife. I can't imagine ... how their world's been turned upside down."

Another neighbor, Philip Cooper, said most of the houses in that block were built in 1963. He wasn't sure if the electrical system at the victims' home had been updated. He said that when he moved into his house it lacked ground fault interrupters, fast-acting circuit breakers that are now standard in homes.

Cooper said that on Sunday evening he spoke with an inspector, who was called out to look at the home's electrical system. Cooper said the inspector told him events such as this one happened just a handful of times a year nationwide.

"It truly is random," said Cooper.

Police said five other people were in the pool at the time of the incident Sunday, but they were farther away from the faulty equipment so their injuries were not as severe.

Four people — a 45-year-old woman, 6-year-old boy, 6-year-old girl and 8-year-old girl — were treated at Desert Regional and released. A 10-year-old girl remains in stable condition at Loma Linda Medical Center.



A tag on the electrical meter at a house in Palm Springs identifies it as unsafe after an electric shock in a pool on March 27. (Rosalie Murphy/The Desert Sun)

Armando Rodriguez, who owns Desert Hot Springs-based pool repair company Ocean Springs Tech, said he recommends that homeowners have a professional inspect their pools twice a year.

"Unfortunately we see a lot of properties that are non-compliant (with municipal codes), meaning wires are exposed, faulty wires, wires not connected properly, moisture or water inside the fixtures," Rodriguez said.