

Arrests in Hazing Death of Carson Starkey
Case #081202009

Bail for the felony charges is \$50,000 and for the misdemeanor charges is \$10,000. If convicted, the suspects face up to a year in County Jail for the misdemeanors, and up to 3 years in State prison for the felonies.

The following is a summary of the investigation and the events that led to the arrests:

Carson STARKEY came to Cal Poly from Austin, Texas as a freshman in September 2008 and he lived in a dormitory on-campus. In October 2008, Carson began the pledge process to become a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) Fraternity. The week of November 30 to December 6, 2008, was designated as "Big Bro Week," during which the pledges, or "Little Brothers," were to be connected with active SAE members, their "Big Brothers." The night of December 1, 2008 was referred to as "Brown Bag Night" - an annual pledge event - during which Big Brothers reveal their identity to the pledges by providing each pledge with a brown bag containing large quantities of alcoholic beverages, along with written clues about the identity of their Big Brother. Haithem IBRAHIM was Carson STARKEY's Big Brother. The investigation revealed that on the night of the brown bag ritual, Haithem IBRAHIM, Russell TAYLOR, and Adam MARSZAL, all active SAE members, selected and purchased large quantities of alcohol from two stores in San Luis Obispo for the pledges to consume. IBRAHIM chose the alcoholic beverages for Carson STARKEY and placed them in Carson's brown bag. Because IBRAHIM was not 21, Russell TAYLOR made the actual purchase of the alcohol provided to Carson STARKEY.

At about 9:10 PM, while active SAE members were purchasing alcohol and placing it into bags, the pledges were instructed to meet in a Cal Poly parking lot. All 17 SAE pledges responded. All were under 21 years of age. The pledges were instructed to go to 551 Highland Drive and gather in the garage of the home, where the room was prepared for the brown bag ritual. The couches were covered with tarps; a bucket to collect vomit was placed in the center of the floor; the pledges were told to sit around the bucket in a circle; and a brown bag containing the alcoholic beverages was placed in front of each of the 17 pledges. Investigators confirmed that Carson had not consumed any alcohol prior going to the house. Zacary ELLIS, the SAE Pledge Educator, then instructed the pledges to consume the contents of their bags by midnight and not to leave the garage, which gave them about 1 ½ hours to complete the task. In addition to the alcohol contained in each pledge's bag, a bottle of 151 proof Everclear liquor was provided to the pledges. Everclear contains an extremely high alcohol content of 75%, about twice the alcohol content of most other hard liquors. While the pledges were drinking, various SAE members were present in the garage.

The investigation revealed that Carson STARKEY drank alcohol from his brown bag, as well as from the Everclear bottle. At some point, Carson became unresponsive. Several SAE members took Carson out of the garage and put him in a vehicle to take him to a hospital, removing Carson's pledge pin and pledge book in the process in order to prevent Carson from being associated with the fraternity. As they started driving, Carson began to vomit, so they returned to the house. SAE members put him to bed and checked on him until approximately 2:00 AM on December 2, 2008, when the SAE members went to bed. A few hours later, Carson was found unresponsive and an SAE member called 9-1-1 and began CPR. Prior to the arrival of fire and police personnel, SAE members woke the remaining pledges and told them to leave. Carson

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STARKEY was taken by ambulance to Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center where he was pronounced dead.

The Police Department immediately launched an investigation, and despite the fact that the residents of 551 Highland were not truthful with investigators about the circumstances leading to Carson's death, investigators were able to determine that his death was directly related to a Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) Fraternity hazing event.

An autopsy revealed that the cause of Carson STARKEY's death was respiratory arrest due to acute ethanol toxicity. Analyses of Carson's blood, vitreous humor, and urine revealed a blood alcohol content ranging from .39% to .447%. It was also determined that no marijuana or drugs were present in Carson STARKEY'S system.

The investigation into Carson's death was very extensive and detailed, and the San Luis Obispo Police Department was assisted by investigators from the Cal Poly University Police Department, the County Sheriff's Department, the County District Attorney's Office, and the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. Investigators conducted interviews with 65 people; served eight search warrants at homes of SAE members; and seized evidence that included 55 computer drives, 27 cellular telephones, and 24 cameras, all of which required forensic analysis.

The investigation revealed that Carson STARKEY died as a result of a hazing ritual conducted as a condition of membership in the SAE Fraternity. The four individuals being charged in his death were determined to be the most directly responsible for the acts which led to Carson's death – purchasing and providing the alcohol and directing the pledges in the drinking ritual. Hazing is a crime in California, and when hazing results in a death, it is a felony.

This investigation has exposed a ritual that was as disturbing as it was deadly; one in which young men were required to drink extreme amounts of alcohol in a very short period of time, and where steps were taken to protect the furniture and floor from vomit that the organizers knew would result. Despite being illegal and against formal Greek organization policies, dangerous hazing rituals remain part of the culture of certain groups; a culture that claims to promote leadership and value friendship, but which fails to protect young and impressionable recruits who simply want to belong. Carson's death was the result of a crime and it was entirely preventable. Tragically, his death was not the first resulting from a fraternity hazing ritual, and unless the Greeks change their culture in a fundamental and meaningful way, it will not be the last.

I now will read a statement prepared by Carson's parents. They do not wish to speak with the press about their son's death, but they asked me to read this statement on their behalf.

[Note: The statement prepared by the Starkey family will be distributed to the media electronically with the press release]



Zacary Westen ELLIS

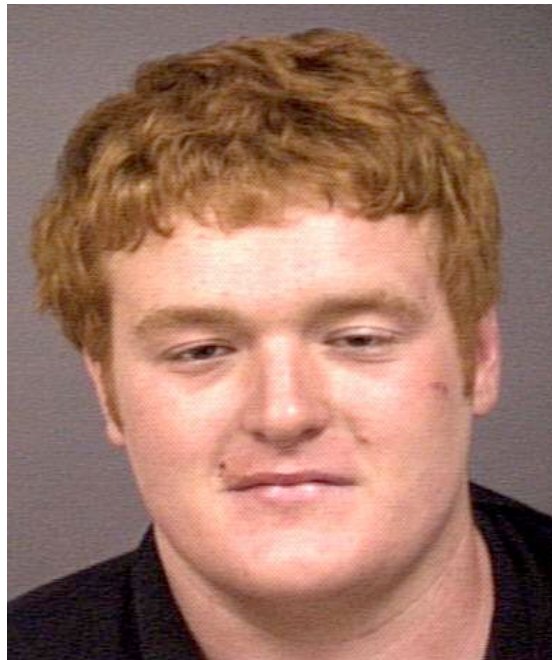


Haithem Muthana IBRAHIM

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Russell Martin TAYLOR



Adam Edward MARSZAL