

Death of toddler left in truck highlights dangers

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SEBRING -- The investigation into the death of 1-year-old Amelia King, who was left in the cab of her father's truck last Friday, has led to an outcry.

But Amelia wasn't the first baby to die from hyperthermia, or heat stroke, after being left inside a vehicle. And, tragically, she won't be the last.

Jan Null, a published meteorologist and professor at San Francisco State University, has made a career of studying weather and the consequences it often creates.

"One of my major research areas is the dynamics of how hot [vehicles](#) can get and the tracking of hyperthermia deaths of children in vehicles," Null told the News-Sun.

Amelia's father, Christopher Sneed King, 34, was arrested Tuesday and charged with aggravated manslaughter of a child and child neglect resulting in great bodily harm.

According to [arrest reports](#), King told investigators that his 4-year-old son put Amelia in the truck while he was inside his home at 507 Ryan Road. The son, however, reportedly told investigators that King took the children to the store to get a lighter and left Amelia in the truck for a "long time."

She died of heat stroke, the medical examiner said.

For decades Null has been studying the tragic deaths of children due to hyperthermia and has revealed startling statistics on the subject.

"With an outside air temperature of about 92 degrees on Friday in Sebring, the inside air temperature of the car would have been as high as [135 degrees](#). Objects or a person inside the car in direct sunlight would have been significantly hotter," Null said.

[The arrest](#) report said that Amelia's back was still "hot to the touch" even after almost 90 minutes inside an air-conditioned ambulance.

Amelia is the second death due to heat stroke in Florida this year. Four weeks ago, 4-year-old Jordan Coleman was left in a day care van for approximately two hours in Broward County.

Amelia's death is the 28th death this year due to hyperthermia in vehicles. According to Null, at least 555 deaths of infants and children have occurred since 1988; 59 of the deaths have occurred in Florida. Florida currently ranks in fourth for hyperthermia deaths of children in vehicles just behind Nevada, Arizona and Arkansas.

A total of 39 children die each year due to car-related heat strokes.

University of South Florida professor of neuroscience David Diamond authored an article on the subject in July 2011. Diamond studied 50 of the cases of child death from hyperthermia as a result of being left in cars.

Diamond's research showed that in each case "otherwise good parents experiencing a combination of sleep deprivation, stress, and change in routine had suffered a memory lapse" and as a result neglected to remove their child from the vehicle.

Florida law states that it is unlawful to leave a child age 6 or younger unattended in a [vehicle for](#) more than 15 minutes.

Currently, only 12 states have laws that specifically prohibit parents from leaving infant and toddlers in vehicles alone. Several states are now actively working on joining those states and working to create laws to protect children.

The head of the mission is a group known as Kids and Cars. Founder and president Janette Fennell continues to be an advocate for the cause.

"We're trying to get people to realize it is just as dangerous to leave a child alone in a vehicle as it is to leave him near a body of water," said Fennell. "There are more states that make it illegal to leave an animal alone in a car than a child. There has to be a specific law to make it illegal to leave a child alone. We want people to understand the dangers."

<http://www.newssun.com/news/091412-sg-Hyperthermia-deaths>