

Father arrested after daughter dies in hot car

J.D. Gallop, Florida Today 5:30 p.m. EDT June 20, 2014



(Photo: Brevard County Sheriff's Office)

ROCKLEDGE, Fla. — A Florida man whose daughter died earlier this week after spending [hours in a hot pickup](#) was arrested Friday on a charge of aggravated manslaughter, police said.

Steven Darnell Lillie, 31, of Cocoa, Fla., will remain in Brevard County Detention Center in Sharpes, Fla., without bond until a court appearance Saturday, according to charging documents. His 9-month-old daughter, Anna Marie Lillie, died Monday when he forgot to drop her off at her grandmother's house before he went to work.

"He's been cooperative the whole time, and he handled the arrest as well as it could be handled.

He was emotional," said Lt. Donna Seyferth, a spokeswoman for the Rockledge Police Department.

Anna Marie spent close to four hours in her car seat in the back seat of her father's truck. She succumbed to heat stroke before Lillie realized the problem when he received a call from a family member asking about the baby.

The child's core body temperature was more than 109 degrees when she arrived at the hospital, police said.

Children are more susceptible than adults to heatstroke, when body's internal temperature rises to 104 degrees. And unless any victims of heatstroke are cooled down quickly, they can die.

"We investigated the case and applied the most appropriate charges. And we did step back and allow the family a chance to grieve," Seyferth said. "But it's a fine line to walk, and ultimately, you had a child die. The rest will be up to a jury." - **Lt. Donna Seyferth, Rockledge Police Department**

Lillie had told police that he forgot to check the backseat of his truck before he went inside the offices of the Fraternal Order of Police where he worked as a telephone solicitor. A court document shows he picked up a co-worker on the way to the office at about 1 p.m. Monday.

Lillie's coworker, who is not named in the document, said Lillie knew the child was in the back seat, asleep. Lillie told police he was going to drop off his colleague before dropping off his child and expected to have to unlock the door. But the door to the office in a strip mall was open. He walked in, saw paperwork on his desk, sat down and focused on his job.

Because the door was unlocked when he arrived, Lillie told police thought he already had dropped off his child and went about his normal routine until the 4:45 p.m. phone call.

In about half of the heatstroke cases, a parent or responsible party is charged in connection with a child's death, said Amber Rollins, director and volunteer manager of KidsAndCars.org. The nonprofit child safety organization monitors news sites and police reports involving children and vehicle accidents.

The group has more difficulty following a case to its conclusion, but in almost 500 incidents where their volunteers were able to determine the outcome about a third resulted in convictions.

"She's been in the car for hours, and I absolutely forgot about her," Lillie said in a 9-1-1 call. "She's not alive."

Anna Marie was the 12th death in the United States so far this year of a child who succumbed to heat stroke in a vehicle, according to KidsAndCars.org.

A 22-month-old boy, Cooper Harris, died Wednesday in Atlanta in the back seat of his father's sport utility vehicle, becoming the 13th death. His father had left him in his safety seat all day, forgetting to drop him off at day care.

Justin Harris, 33, of Marietta, Ga., was charged with murder and cruelty to children within hours of the boy's death. He pleaded not guilty in his first court appearance Thursday night.

Harris, who works for Home Depot, is being held without bond in Cobb County Jail in Marietta. A bond hearing in his case is set for July 15.

While the U.S. is a focus of KidsAndCars.org, officials point out that the deaths don't just happen here: A 3-year-old girl died June 10 in Rybnik, Poland, when her father forgot to take his child to kindergarten and continued on to work at an electric plant; prosecutors there were deciding whether to charge the man, who was not identified, with involuntary manslaughter.

In 2013, 44 children across the USA died as a result of vehicle-related heat deaths, the group said.

The National Safety Council recommends that parents leave something in the back seat of their vehicle that they need for work or their errands, such as a briefcase, purse or cellphone, to serve as a reminder of a child in a car seat.

KidsAndCars.org suggests keeping a stuffed animal in a child's car seat to put in the front passenger seat as a reminder when a parent is transporting the baby.

The number of deaths from children being left in cars began to climb in the late 1990s when officials realized that front-seat airbags were killing kids in wrecks and a movement began to put kids in the back, Rollins said.

"Children absolutely are safer in the back seat," she said. "But one of the unintended consequences is that children were being forgotten.

"One of the challenges is getting parents to realize that it's not a neglect or bad parent issue," Rollins said.

On the window of a business in Rockledge near where Lillie had parked was a sign: "Your prayers are warm and welcome ... P.S. It's not illegal to glance into the car you park next to."

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<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/06/20/girl-dies-hot-car/11087783/>