

Infant dies in San Jose after being left in car

Vivian Ho and Kale Williams Updated 7:28 am, Friday, [April 18, 2014](#)

A 9-month-old boy died in San Jose when his father, after forgetting to drop him off with a babysitter, left him in his car seat as he worked all day, only to return to the vehicle and find the child unconscious, authorities said.

It appeared to be the nation's first instance this year of a forgotten child dying in a hot car - a tragic occurrence that child-safety advocates warn can happen to even the most responsible of parents.

The father, who like his son has not been identified, told police he was supposed to drop the infant off at a babysitter's home before work Wednesday, said Sgt. [Heather Randol](#), a San Jose police spokeswoman.

He parked his vehicle on the 3700 block of Payne Avenue, not realizing the baby was still strapped in behind him, Randol said. When he returned to his car at 7:15 p.m., he made the horrific discovery.

The boy was pronounced dead a short time later. While homicide detectives are conducting an investigation, they did not arrest the father, whose case will ultimately be reviewed by the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office.

Neighbor [Kevin Carroll](#), 59, said the father parked his silver Toyota SUV on the quiet residential street every day.

The wide two-lane roadway made up of primarily one-story ranch-style homes attracts its fair share of car activity, but has little foot traffic, especially during the day. Carroll said on Wednesday, he had actually walked by the SUV three times, but because of the tinted windows, couldn't notice anything amiss.

At about 7 p.m., he saw fire trucks arrive and firefighters going into the car. After one of them stepped away, Carroll said he heard him say, "The baby is dead."

"We're just so saddened," he said. "We prayed for the baby today."

Though it's unclear what the father does for a living, [Joe Nijmeh](#), 63, said the father picks up a box truck at his home on Payne Avenue every day for work. Nijmeh was home all day Wednesday when the incident happened.

"He's a very responsible father who was so proud of the baby," he said. "The baby was like a gift from heaven for them."

The boy's cause of death has not been released. However, infants who die after being left in cars for long periods often succumb to heat stroke.

Temperatures in San Jose topped out at 79 degrees on Wednesday, but Kids and Cars, a nonprofit child safety organization, said the interior of a car in such circumstances can reach up to 120 degrees.

The group's president, former San Francisco resident [Janette Fennell](#), tracks the deaths and said the one in San Jose was the first this year, after roughly 32 cases in the U.S. in 2013.

The deaths are difficult for most people to comprehend, Fennell said, and the knee-jerk reaction is often to condemn the parents as neglectful or incompetent.

"What usually happens is that people get very judgmental because it's so hard to imagine that ever happening to you," she said. "In most cases, the defense mechanism is to make monsters out of the parents that it happened to so that they can further distance themselves from thinking that something like that could happen to them. That's just the biggest mistake anyone can make."

New parents, she said, are often sleep-deprived, and can be prone to forgetfulness when there are changes to their routine.

Fennell and others are fighting for legal reforms and technological leaps that might reduce the deaths.

A Japanese company, Tomy, has come out with a car seat that connects to parents' phones, texting them or calling 911 if a child is left in a seat, but Fennell said auto manufacturers have been reluctant to develop safeguards that serve the same function.

She urged the family of the baby who died to get in touch with her organization, which can put them in touch with other families who have gone through the same trauma.

"I'm sure they're feeling all alone," she said. "I'm sure they're feeling like they're the only ones that it's happened to and that nobody can understand what they're going to. But we have wonderful families that are willing to help them through it."

Vivian Ho and Kale Williams are [San Francisco Chronicle](#) staff writers. E-mail:

vho@sfgate.com, kwilliams@sfgate.com Twitter: [@VivianHo](#), [@sfkale](#)

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