

## local news

# Officials investigate silicone death

## Transgendered woman dies after illicit injection

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

Officials in Dougherty County are investigating the death of a transgendered woman in Albany, Ga., thought to be the victim of a lethal silicone injection in January, according to Jim Paulk, the county's assistant district attorney.

Paulk would not release any further information about the case until the investigation closes, he said.

There is not yet a determined cause of death for the 23-year old, but industrial-grade silicone likely played a part, said Dr. Mark Koponen, deputy chief medical examiner at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

"What we see is individuals who are dying of complications of illicit silicone injections," Koponen said. "There's an underground out there of individuals who provide silicone injections for others for the purpose of altering their body habitus, so they can attain an image that is more pleasing to them. And these people who are doing this often have no medical background, and what they inject is not safe."

Once injected into the body, silicone can migrate to places where it is not intended,



Transgendered activist **Dallas Denny** warns against the dangers of silicone injections. Authorities in south Georgia say such injections may have led to the death of a transgendered woman in Albany. (Photo by Joan Sherwood)

causing skin discoloration, scarring or complications with organs, Koponen said.

Often the silicone ends up in the blood stream and can block small blood vessels in the lungs, resulting in potentially lethal scarring of the lung tissue, he said.

"It just ends up in little globules, here, there and everywhere," said Dallas Denny, a transgendered activist who has warned of silicone injections in lectures and online articles for 15 years.

The popularity of silicone injections is especially high in transgender circles "especially around the club girls," who want to enhance their breasts, lips, buttocks and cheeks, Denny said.

"There are people who travel around the country with no medical credentials pumping up people with silicone," said Denny, who was contacted by both Paulk and Koponen after the Albany woman's death.

Paulk and Koponen told Denny they were looking for anyone with information to help locate the person responsible for administering the silicone injections, she said.

"They implied that it was one person and they have a suspect, and my impression is they think they know who did it," Denny said.

The person responsible for the death is a "woman from Atlanta," said Jazzmyn Braxton, a 23-year-old transgendered woman who is now sick from silicone injections, according to a Jan. 21 broadcast on WALB-TV in Albany.

The woman who did Braxton's injections lived in Atlanta, but traveled across the Southeast, Braxton said during the interview.

Often the person injecting the silicone is a male-to-female transgendered person, who charges anywhere from \$300 to \$700 for an injection, according to Denny.

The injections take place at word-of-mouth "pumping parties" with the use of a big bore needle and industrial-grade silicone calk or, more rarely, medical grade silicone extracted from implants, Denny said.

"It's essentially the same stuff you get at Home Depot," she said.

The FDA has not approved medical-

grade silicone for injection, Koponen said.

The person responsible for the Albany death could face charges of practicing medicine without a license and murder, Koponen said.

Last month, a man in Dallas, Texas, was sentenced to five years in prison after several of his former clients discovered their lips to be swollen, lumpy, blistered and extremely sensitive within weeks of silicone injection, according to the Associated Press.

The Dallas man, Luis Sanchez, pleaded guilty to the charges of practicing medicine without a license.

And in Miami, Fla., last November, a man was sentenced to 30 years in prison for injecting silicone in a transgendered woman's buttocks at a "pumping party," according to reports from the Miami Herald.

The woman died as a result, and a jury convicted the man, Mark Hawkins, of felony third-degree murder, unlicensed practice of medicine, and culpable negligence.

### MORE INFO

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