



Sacramento County District Attorney's Office

THIEN HO
District Attorney

DATE: September 7, 2023

TO: Captain Vanessa Vaden, Commander
Sacramento County Sheriff's Office
Correctional Services Unit
651 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

FROM: Sacramento County District Attorney's Office

RE: In-Custody Death – Joseph Lee Wood (DOB 9/17/70)
SSO Report No. 23-23969
Date of Incident – 01/23/23

The above case was referred to this office for the review of the circumstances surrounding the death of inmate Joseph Lee Wood at Sutter Medical Center on January 23, 2023.

Wood was arrested and booked into the Sacramento County Main Jail on September 24, 2022. He was charged with a felony violation of California Penal Code section 245(a)(1) (assault with a deadly weapon – a knife).

Wood was housed with no cellmate in the Mental Health Housing Unit. He was being held pending a possible placement in the Alta Regional Diversion Program after he was found incompetent to stand trial pursuant to Penal Code section 1368.

On January 23, 2023, Wood was given extra time to shower and missed lunch.¹ At approximately 12:36 p.m., Sacramento Sheriff Deputies Alexandros Sargetis and Alexander Reginato escorted Wood back to his cell and an inmate pod worker gave Wood a peanut butter sandwich.

At approximately 12:48 p.m., Deputies Sargetis and Reginato were notified by another inmate that Wood was lying in an unusual position in his cell and was possibly unconscious. Deputies Sargetis and Reginato, additional deputies, and Sergeant Ken Gouveia all responded to the cell. Deputy Sargetis saw Wood lying in the corner of his bunk. He noticed that Wood's skin was pale in color.

¹ Wood's cell required cleaning because he smeared fecal matter throughout his cell.

Deputies immediately entered the cell. Deputy Reginato determined that Wood was not breathing and had no pulse. Wood was placed onto the cell floor.

Deputy Reginato began administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The Sacramento Fire Department and jail medical staff were called "Code 3."² Jail medical staff responded and suctioned what appeared to be vomit from Wood's mouth.

Fire Department medics arrived at approximately 12:57 p.m. and took over medical aid. The medics noticed Wood's airway was blocked and used suction to clear Wood's airway. An unknown substance was removed from Wood's mouth.

At approximately 1:17 p.m., the Fire Department medics indicated Wood had a pulse.

At approximately 1:20 p.m., Wood was emergency transported to Sutter Medical Center. Wood was pronounced deceased at approximately 11:25 p.m.

Other inmates in the surrounding cells were interviewed and stated that they did not see or hear anything unusual.

Jail surveillance video was reviewed. The video depicts the events consistently with the description above.

An autopsy was performed by Dr. Jason Tovar, a pathologist with the Sacramento County Coroner's Office. He determined Wood's cause of death to be choking on food bolus.³ The manner of death was classified as an accident.

No evidence of criminal misconduct is presented or suggested in any of the supporting reports. Accordingly, the District Attorney's Office will take no further action in this matter.

Cc: Sacramento Sheriff Lieutenant Janae Galovich
Rosa A. Vega, Sacramento County Coroner's Office
Francine Tournour, Sacramento County Office of Inspector General

² Code 3 indicates to consider the call an emergency and to immediately respond with lights and siren as reasonably necessary.

³ Bolus is a small, rounded mass of chewed food, at the moment of swallowing.