

Killer's method was so easy, so anonymous

by Tim Bannon
Herald staff writer

Most people wouldn't notice it, and apparently nobody did — a shopper adding a box of Tylenol to a grocery shelf, an anonymous, simple act, perhaps untraceable, but deadly.

In three days, seven people were killed. Now the deaths have stopped but so, it seems, have the leads.

Investigators are looking for one person or a team, disgruntled or "mad" or maybe just a loner seeking murderous expression. Usually detectives try to stereotype a criminal and hunt through that psyche; this time the clues lead nowhere.

"A NEEDLE in a haystack," said Chicago private detective Larry Mayer. "I'll be surprised if they ever find him."

Police have two investigative avenues. One is fingerprints. If the killer was sloppy he might have left his prints on the capsules, which would not have been touched since. But fingerprints are worthless without suspects. And so the police are rounding up shoplifters, "kooks," angry employ-

ees — anyone with a reason, however slim, to put an area into a panic.

Or the criminal will sing. Arlington Heights Deputy Police Chief Paul Buckholz said investigators are waiting for that confessional phone call, threatening more poisoning. Or maybe the killer will boast and the police will get a tip.

Declaring that a "madman" with mental disorders is behind the deaths could be an "insult" that would draw the culprit out. But police are surprised nobody has claimed responsibility.

IT COULD be terrorists or it could be a teenager who stole the cyanide from the chemistry lab. "It could be anybody," Mayer said.

The most alarming fact is the ease of the crime. "I don't think we've seen the end of this kind of thing," said one Northwest suburban detective who asked not to be identified. "That scares me."

Whoever it is, a frightening image of the crime has emerged. It appears the killer simply removed — or bought — the Tylenol from the shelves of at least four suburban stores and one Chicago store. He — or she — may have taken

more than one box from a single location, thus explaining why at least three of the lethal bottles had the same lot number — MC2880.

The Tylenol killer then scraped out the white, granular contents of the capsules, filled them with a pasty gray concoction and returned the bottles of now-deadly pills to their boxes. Then, armed with the time bombs, he journeyed to two Jewel Food Stores, a Walgreen's, an Osco and an independent grocery where he planted a single, tainted box back on the shelf.

IT WAS A relatively simple chore. Only four tampered Tylenol bottles were needed to kill seven people. In a single day, the killer could have planted a dozen or more boxes in a dozen or more stores. Only the systematic check of tens of thousands of capsules in thousands of bottles will tell the depth of the killer's vengeance.

And then there is the cyanide. Potassium cyanide, the white crystal form found in the poisoned capsules, is commonly used for experiments in school chemistry classes and medical labs and in several industries for such things as metal extraction.

"If somebody wanted it bad enough they could get it," said Chris Wiant of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

The Tylenol capsules are easy to open, empty, refill and close. Attorney General Tyrone Faucher speculated that maybe more than one person was involved because some capsules were "butchered" while others were meticulously refilled. But then he admitted that the killer simply could have gotten sloppy in the haste of preparing the lethal pills.

TYLENOL AND most medicine bottles are not sealed, so without careful inspection, tampering would go unnoticed. People have trusted packaged foods and medicines for so long that it is doubtful a slightly tattered Tylenol box or a "different" looking capsule would draw a second look.

Such faith may be lost. Left with no tips and too few clues, police are scouring everything, interviewing everyone connected, checking every lead, soliciting help. "A dragnet," Faucher calls it.

Meanwhile the killer or killers observe — enjoying the publicity and panic.



Herald photo by Mike Seeling

A LONG AND TEDIOUS SEARCH. That's how Illinois Attorney General Tyrone Faucher describes the massive effort to find the killer of seven Chicago area residents who died after taking cyanide-packed Tylenol

capsules. Faucher met with reporters Sunday night to say there is no real break in the case, but police have begun questioning two dozen "potential suspects."

Tylenol suspect list grows

by Susan Duerksen and John Slania
Herald staff writers

Investigators began interviewing "a couple of dozen" potential suspects Sunday in a frenzied effort to solve the cyanide-poisoning deaths of seven Chicago area people.

Those called in for interviews included disgruntled employees and unhappy customers of the stores connected with the cyanide-laced Tylenol killings, as well as "just plain weirdos that hang around the store," said Illinois Attorney General Tyrone Faucher. He said the list will grow considerably today as authorities go through store personnel records to find all recently discharged employees.

ONE SUSPECT, a man arrested in August for shoplifting bottles of Tylenol from a suburban store, was cleared Sunday when it was discovered he had been in jail since the shoplifting.

Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules found in a parking lot in Kane County were being tested for cyanide. Sheriff's police found several hundred of the capsules scattered in the parking lot of a Howard Johnson's at the Route 25 exit of I-294 Tuesday.

A sheriff's detective who handled the capsules reported feeling sick later that night. Scientists say cyanide can be absorbed through the skin, but results of tests on the Kane County capsules were not available Sunday night.

With "a couple hundred thousand" boxes of Tylenol confiscated from Chicago area stores, investigators sped up their check for cyanide. Joerg Pirt, assistant chief toxicologist for the Illinois Department of Public Health, said rather than emptying each capsule, the lab workers now will use a specially treated paper strip to test the "atmos-

More coverage:

- Couple in Europe with Tylenol in luggage.
- Cyanide killer joins infamous list of mystery murderers.

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phere" inside the bottles, and that way one person can test 10 bottles a minute. If any capsule contains cyanide, he said it will fill the bottle with a gaseous form of the poison within 30 seconds.

FAUCHER SAID Extra-Strength Tylenol has been cleared off store shelves in the Chicago area, but he is worried some area residents may unknowingly have tainted capsules in their medicine cabinets.

An Osco drug store in Schaumburg's Woodfield shopping center is the only store so far where investigators have found cyanide-filled Tylenol capsules on the shelves. Tainted capsules were used by each of the victims who bought them at Jewel stores in Arlington Heights and Elk Grove Village, Frank's Finer Foods in Winfield, Dominick's in Villa Park and Walgreen's at North Avenue and Wells Street in Chicago.

The known victims of the poisoning, all of whom died Wednesday or Thursday, are Adani Janus, 27, of Arlington Heights; his brother Stanley, 25, and Stanley's wife Theresa, 19, of Lisle; Mary Kellerman, 12, of Elk Grove Village; Mary McFarland, 31, of Elmhurst; Mary Reiner, 27, of Winfield, and Paula Prince, 35, of Chicago.

A funeral service for the three mem-

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RTA gets \$142.5 million grant

by Thomas J. Lee
Herald political editor

Chicago-area mass transit received a pre-election financial windfall Sunday as Gov. James R. Thompson announced federal grants totaling \$142.5 million for an array of transit-related capital improvements, including the purchase of hundreds of buses and dozens of railway cars and locomotives.

After boasting the grants constituted the largest investment ever in the state's transit facilities, Thompson took the spotlight to denounce the transportation program put forward last month by Adlai E. Stevenson III, his Democratic opponent in the Nov. 2 election. Stevenson has called for a nickel-per-gallon gasoline tax increase to help finance a \$1.44 billion program of highway rebuilding and mass-transit operating assistance.

The governor said Stevenson's plan would most likely fail to win legislative approval and, even if it were to pass, would be incapable of bringing about the far-reaching improvements that Stevenson promises.

THE GRANTS announced Sunday will be concentrated in the six-county

metropolitan area, his aides said. All but \$2.2 million of the money will be spent here.

Included in the package are commuter-rail and rapid-transit track rehabilitation worth \$59 million, acquisition of the bankrupt Rock Island railway by the Regional Transportation Authority for \$31.5 million plus additional funding to be announced later, and the purchase of between 250 and 350 Chicago Transit Authority buses for \$27 million.

Other improvements include the renovation of commuter rail stations in Des Plaines and certain other suburbs, the restoration or construction of Loop L train platforms, and the renovation of subway stations in downtown Chicago.

The infusion of federal grants, coupled with \$62 million left over from the canceled Crosstown Expressway and earmarked as the state's matching share, will push the total being spent this year on transit improvements in Illinois to nearly \$344 million, Thompson aides said. That represents a continuing increase in mass-transit capital assistance and constitutes the largest

capital plan for mass transportation in Illinois history, the governor told reporters at a news briefing in Chicago.

Thompson, asked to assess Stevenson's transportation plan, launched into a rapid-fire critique in which he expressed doubt the nickel-a-gallon tax increase could ever win legislative approval, much less within the 60 days Stevenson forecast.

"ASSUMING IT has the full support of Democratic legislative leaders, where are they? Not one has stepped forward to say, 'That's a good plan' or 'I endorse that plan' or 'I can get that plan through the House or the Senate.' Their silence is eloquent testimony to some of the failures of the plan," Thompson said.

"I think a 5-cent increase in the gasoline tax is too high," he said, noting the past legislative wrangling over the RTA and quoting Senate President Philip Rock as saying the Legislature would refuse to increase the gasoline tax by more than 2 1/2 cents per gallon.

"It will not be enacted by the Illinois General Assembly."

Thompson said a fatal flaw in the Stevenson plan was a proposal to pro-

vide RTA operating assistance from a statewide gasoline tax rather than from the income and sales taxes.

"The Legislature will not pass such a plan," the governor said. "If the RTA is to receive an operating subsidy from the state of Illinois it should be on the same kind of basis — if not necessarily the same formula — as the downstate mass-transit districts now operate under."

Thompson also took Stevenson to task for not elaborating on a proposal to end diversion of \$83 million from the road fund to the general fund.

"He doesn't say which general-fund programs — is it education? is it senior citizens? is it law enforcement? is it corrections? is it child abuse? — that he's going to curtail or eliminate from the general fund. Or if he's not going to cut programs to the amount of \$83 million, is he going to raise taxes to the extent of \$83 million?"

The governor also said Stevenson overstated the revenue from a truck-fee increase and he chided his opponent for proposing to burden the state with what he called an "excessive" bonding program.

Syria says it will get out of Lebanon if Israel does

From Herald news services

Syria said Sunday it has agreed to withdraw its 35,000 troops from eastern Lebanon if Israeli forces leave the country simultaneously.

The latest peace overtures came as Israeli troops searched for an armed band of guerrillas that ambushed an Israeli troop bus in eastern Lebanon Sunday, killing six soldiers and wounding 22 others.

The attack occurred about 4 p.m. Beirut time on the Beirut-Damascus highway. The ambush site is less than 4 miles from the front line of Syria's 35,000-man army in the eastern Bekaa Valley.

Israel, whose 70,000 soldiers occupy southern Lebanon and confront the Syrian army in the Bekaa Valley, welcomed the Syrian proposal as a "positive step."

BUT ISRAEL also cautioned any agreement must include the removal of an estimated 10,000 Palestinian guerrillas still based in the north of the war-ravaged country.

During two days of talks in Damascus, Syrian officials reportedly told U.S. envoy Philip Habib they were willing to withdraw their force if Isra-

el leaves the country at the same time.

According to government officials, however, the Syrians told Habib, "The Palestinian guerrilla presence in the Bekaa Valley and northern Lebanon is an issue that concerns only the Palestine Liberation Organization."

Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir said, meanwhile, a treaty between Israel and Lebanon, not a multinational peacekeeping force, would be the best way to prevent further violence.

On CBS's "Face the Nation," Shamir said, "It is in the best interest of both people, the Lebanese people and the Israeli people, and I believe the majority of the Lebanese people is convinced such a peace is necessary."

He said the two nations should try to form a secure border "that will not permit the PLO to come back."

In Beirut, Lebanese newspapers reported that President Amin Gemayel wants to form an interim Cabinet, headed by Lebanon's security chief and including other military men, that would have wide powers to impose law and order.

Dailies ranging from the leftist As-Safir to the independent An-Nahar

quoted official sources as saying Gemayel would announce his choice for prime minister by Monday.

IN TEL AVIV, an army spokesman denied a London Sunday Times report that the entire Israeli general staff, led by chief of staff Lt. Gen. Rafael Eitan, demanded Defense Minister Ariel Sharon step down last week.

Senior army officers gave Sharon a tongue-lashing over the massacre of Palestinian civilians in Beirut but their criticism stopped short of demanding his resignation, reports said Sunday.

Elsewhere, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak accused Israel Sunday of "sounding the drums of war" and extinguishing the "flame of peace" the two nations had lit three years ago.

Mubarak, in a 45-minute speech inaugurating Parliament's winter session, used the harshest words ever by an Egyptian leader against Israel since the two countries concluded a peace treaty in 1979.

But Mubarak warned "Israeli policy has done a gross disservice to the cause of peace and stability in the region because they went back to sounding the drums of war and flexing the muscles of tyrannous force."

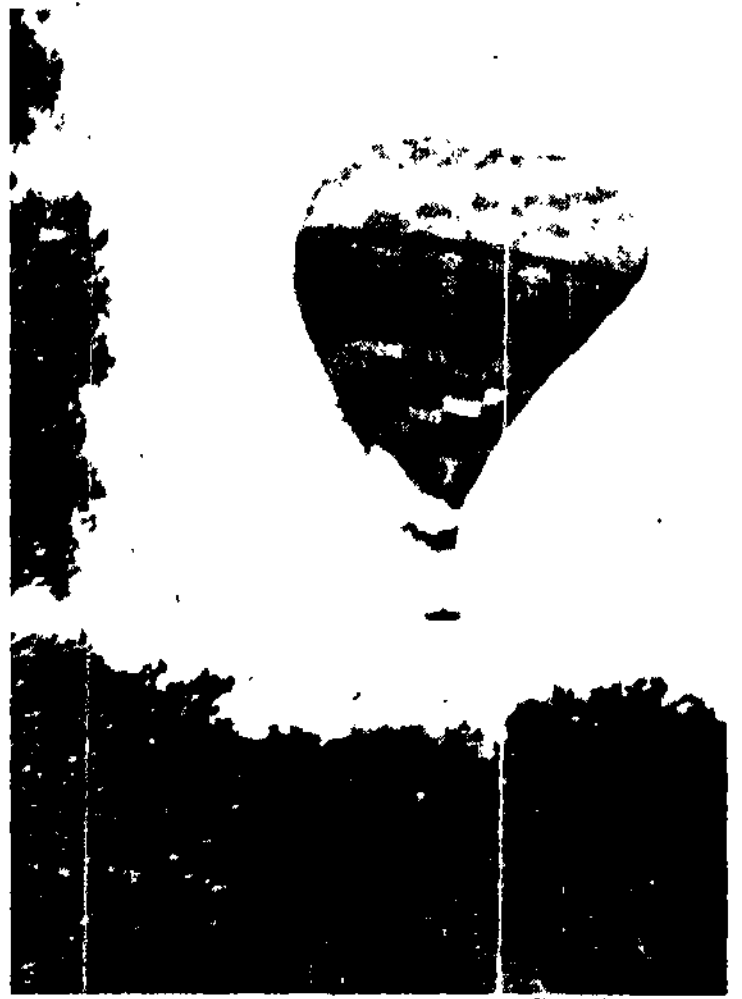


Photo by Gary Balle for UPI

Fire fall

Four people were killed and three injured when this balloon reinflated after landing and rose, exploded and caught fire Sunday in Albuquerque, N.M. Three occupants were seen falling from it after the gondola ignited. This photo was taken just seconds before the balloon collapsed into the Rio Grande. Story on Page 3.

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Dieter's dream?
It could be a dieter's dream come true: a pill that lets you eat all the pasta and bread you want and still lose weight. But the Food and Drug Administration says the pills are on the market illegally.
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One fine day
Sunny today with highs in the mid 70s. Tonight, fair with lows in the mid 50s. — Page 2

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