

Unattended infant killed by Siberian husky at home near Independence, police say

11-day-old boy was in car seat on bed

By [David Hanners](#)

dhanners@pioneerpress.com

Updated: 02/19/2010 11:24:16 PM CST

When it involves a baby's death, even the tired eyes of veteran cops well up. At times pausing to compose himself, West Hennepin Public Safety Director Ray McCoy explained Friday how a 71-pound Siberian husky attacked and killed 11-day-old Robert Hocker in a home west of Independence.

While McCoy and his office are investigating the death, the Hennepin County medical examiner's office said there was no doubt the boy died from "head injuries suffered in canine attack."

When emergency crews were called to the family's home at 12:28 p.m. Thursday, they worked for 40 minutes to try to revive Robert. He was pronounced dead at 1:06 p.m.

"Anytime you deal with the death of an infant, it tugs at your heartstrings a bit," McCoy said.

Officials declined to release the names of the infant's parents but said the family was cooperating with investigators. McCoy said that so far, they had few details, and that the ones they have they won't release while the investigation is open.

Four people live at the address, McCoy said, and although he declined to say how many were home at the time of the attack, he did say nobody claims to have seen it.

"What we are doing is documenting all the facts, documenting the scene, and when we're done, we'll forward it to the Hennepin County attorney's office for the determination if there's any charges," McCoy said.

The child was tucked into a car seat, unattended on a bed, when the attack occurred, McCoy said

American Kennel Club describes Siberian huskies as "friendly and gentle." But the organization's Web site also cautions that the breed's "predatory instincts are strong, so Siberians should be supervised around small animals in and around the home."

Richard Polsky, an expert in dog attacks, said Siberian huskies have been involved in fatal attacks on humans but in far fewer documented attacks than pit bulls and Rottweilers. "Huskies have been involved, but not to a large extent," he said. "It's mostly Rots and pits."

The dog, named Dealer, has been impounded at the Animal Humane Society in Buffalo and is quarantined for 10 days. The animal will be tested for disease and then euthanized at the end of the quarantine, McCoy said.

Dealer is large by AKC standards. McCoy said the dog weighs 71 pounds; the national organization says males generally weigh 45 to 60 pounds. The AKC also says that the breed "does not display the possessive qualities of the guard dog" and that its "intelligence, tractability and eager disposition make him an agreeable companion and willing worker."

The attack occurred at a home in the 3000 block of Lake Haughey Road, which runs along the western shore of Haughey Lake about midway between Independence and Delano. The occupants keep at least one other dog, a basset hound, but officials said they had never gotten complaints about the animals.

McCoy said his department, which patrols Independence and Maple Plain, had responded to "numerous" calls to the home in the past but for "nothing that would be more than just a nuisance violation." He said the infractions involved matters such as burning without a permit or violation of other city ordinances.

According to state records, Daniel James Hocker, 48, who lists the home as his address, has had run-ins with police. Court records show that in March 2007, he was convicted in Stearns County of misdemeanor domestic assault with the intent to cause fear of bodily harm or death. He was sentenced to 90 days in the county jail, but 80 days were stayed for the two years he spent on supervised probation. He was fined \$1,000 and ordered to have no contact with the victim.

In March 2003, Hocker was convicted in Hennepin County of carrying a pistol without a permit, a gross misdemeanor. He was sentenced to 91 days, but because he had a job, he was placed on electronic home monitoring and his sentence was stayed for two years. McCoy would not say whether Hocker was related to the child.

Robert's death is at least the fourth death attributed to a dog attack in the U.S. this year. On Feb. 12, a 5-year-old girl in Terry, Miss., was killed by a neighbor's pit bull. Pit bulls also were the killers in the other two cases: the Jan. 9 death of a 3-year-old boy in Apple Valley, Calif., and the Jan. 17 mauling of a 56-year-old Chicago man.

Polsky, who has a doctorate in animal behavior and is founder of Animal Behavior Counseling Services in Los Angeles, documented 32 fatal dog attacks in the U.S. in 2009. He said finding out what happened to Robert would require a lengthy investigation. "It's hard to say exactly what happened," he said. "You don't know what the background of the dog was, how familiar it was with kids, whether they introduced it to the child. "You have to do a fairly thorough forensic examination in order to get an understanding of how the attack happened or whether there was any negligence on the part of the parent," he said.

David Hanners can be reached at 612-338-6516.