



**OFFICE OF THE CORONER
COUNTY OF CHESTER**

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“Committed Service and
Responsiveness”

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Chester County Coroner’s Office has investigated seven winter weather-related fatalities so far this year. Hypothermia caused or contributed to the deaths of six Chester County residents. Four persons were found outdoors and two died inside homes with inadequate or no heat. Ages of these decedents ranged from 59 to 87, and all but one were male. Alcohol intoxication played a role in one death, while pre-existing conditions such as heart disease or dementia were present in others.

As previously reported, Gordon Owen, 81, of West Grove, was found deceased outdoors after a 2-day missing person search. His cause of death was coronary artery disease with contributing factors of cold exposure and dementia, manner accidental.

Carbon monoxide poisoning was the cause of death in a seventh weather-related fatality. Jorge Luis Vilella, 19, of Kennett Township, was found deceased in his vehicle on January 11, 2021, after being reported missing several days earlier. The manner of death was ruled accidental with no indication of suicide. Vilella appeared to have been running his car to keep warm, but modifications made to the car allowed carbon monoxide to get into the vehicle. After toxicological testing determined carbon monoxide poisoning as the cause of death, Kennett Township Police Department and the Chester County Hazardous Materials Response Team tested the vehicle. Replicating the conditions under which the decedent had been found, fatal levels of carbon monoxide accumulated within 30 minutes.

“The past weeks have seen more weather-related deaths than usual across the country, and Chester County has not been spared,” said Chester County Coroner Dr. Christina VandePol. “Sadly, these are preventable deaths, but hypothermia can set in very quickly in the kind of weather we’ve had this winter, especially in the elderly. We also urge people to avoid using risky ways to keep warm as they can result in fatal outcomes from fire or carbon monoxide poisoning.”

The Chester County Coroner’s Office is an independent agency serving the citizens and honoring the deceased of the county by investigating the facts and circumstances concerning jurisdictional deaths which have occurred within Chester County. We determine the cause and manner of death, the identity of the decedent, and provide notification to the legal next of kin, while exhibiting the highest degree of compassion, professionalism, and integrity.