

▶ Gene Hackman death press conference update

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:00:15

Good afternoon, everybody. I'm Sheriff Adan Mendoza, Sheriff for Santa Fe, New Mexico, Santa Fe County.

On Wednesday, February 26, 2025, at approximately 1:45 p.m., Santa Fe County Sheriff's deputies were dispatched to 1425 Old Sunset Trail, where Gene Hackman, 95, and his wife, Betsy Arakawa, 65, and a dog were found deceased.

An individual arrived to perform maintenance on the residence, became concerned after receiving no answer, and contacted neighborhood security to conduct a welfare check. Security then checked on the residence and observed Mr. Hackman and Mrs. Arakawa on the ground, unresponsive, through a window, and called 911.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:01:26

Deputies then secured the scene and notified the Criminal Investigations Division due to the unusual circumstances of two decedents in the residence. There was a concern for scene safety. Santa Fe City Fire personnel and the New Mexico Gas Company were requested to the scene to test for carbon monoxide or other foreign elements. The scene was deemed safe at approximately 9:30 p.m. A search warrant was issued and executed on the residence.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:02:05

Collected from the residence were two green-colored cell phones, two bottles of medication, one bottle of over-the-counter Tylenol, medical records, and a 2025 monthly planner calendar. Those items were secured from the residence for evidentiary purposes. The Sheriff's Animal Control Division worked with the family to ensure the safety of the two surviving dogs. Investigation personnel worked diligently throughout the night and morning to process the scene for evidence. It should be noted that there were no apparent signs of foul play.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:02:50

In the early hours of Thursday, February 27, 2025, Mr. Hackman and Mrs. Betsy Arakawa were transported to the Office of the Medical Investigator. An autopsy was performed. Initial findings noted no external trauma to either individual. The manner and cause of death have not been determined. The official results of the autopsy and toxicology reports are pending.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:03:26

Just today, I spoke to Dr. Jarrell, the pathologist from the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator. This was at 2:00 p.m. today. She advised that there were several tests that were submitted to be expedited.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:03:26

She revealed to me the following information: Both individuals tested negative for carbon monoxide. An initial interrogation was conducted of Mr. Hackman's pacemaker. This revealed

that his last event was recorded on February 17, 2025. I was advised that a more thorough investigation will be completed.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza

That'll conclude my statement.

I will take a few questions, and just so everybody knows, this is still an active investigation. I'll take questions.

Reporter | 00:04:10

Based on what you know about the conditions of both bodies, who do you believe died first?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:04:20

That's a very hard thing to determine, even with the assistance of OMI. We asked that question because it's something we want to know, but it's a very difficult determination to make. I don't think even OMI could make that determination based on the initial autopsy. Any other questions?

Reporter | 00:04:39

In the 2025 planner that was mentioned in the search warrant return, were there events scheduled for either member of the couple in the coming weeks?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:04:50

That will be part of our investigation. We will look and try to gain access to the cell phones. We'll be analyzing cell phone data, phone calls, text messages, events, and photos to piece a timeline together.

One of the things we do in an investigation is try to piece a timeline together, usually before the event happens. That gives us a lot of information. But in this case, it seems like we're doing a reverse timeline. We're building a timeline starting from the time of death and the autopsy results, and we're going to start working our way backwards. We're going to do both approaches and, hopefully, make a determination about what may have happened to both individuals.

Reporter | 00:05:07

What may have happened to both the individuals? When you were saying the last event on the pacemaker was February 17th, would that kind of give you a sign that's probably the day that he died? So they've been dead for about 10 days according to the pathologist?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:05:18

I think that is a very good assumption—that that was his last day of life.

Reporter | 00:05:39

Why are the pills such important evidence?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:05:50

The pills, the pills, okay. The finding of the pills is such important evidence, and that could be part of the cause of death.

Well, of course, they are important evidence. These are things that I think are important for the pathologist and OMI to consider to try to make a determination of what the cause and manner of death are.

All that information is collected not just for us, but so we can provide that information to the pathologist in OMI, so they can try and make a determination of what the manner and cause is. I think that's important for OMI also.

Reporter | 00:06:06

Sheriff, was there any surveillance video, and is that helping you to determine what may have led up to this?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:06:17

That's a good question, and that question has been asked. I respect Mr. Hackman's and Ms. Arakawa's regard for privacy. I think everybody here understands that they were very private individuals and a very private family.

There is no surveillance, as we know of right now, in the interior or the exterior of the residence that is going to help us determine a timeline or events that happened.

Investigator Tom with CBS News | 00:06:37

Have investigators been able to get into the obtained cell phones?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:06:50

Not at this time. We have them in our possession. Those were collected yesterday. It's going to take a process.

We do have software, and we may have to reach out to other agencies for assistance to get past—if they're password protected—to get past the passwords and gain access to that information. These are some of the things that are going to take a little bit of time.

Reporter N McLen from the Albuquerque Journal | 00:07:32

Are there names on the prescription bottles? Do we have any idea as to who was taking any of those medications?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:07:45

Due to HIPAA, I don't want to release who the medication was prescribed to or what the medication is. I think there's a HIPAA concern there, so I won't release that information.

Reporter | 00:07:50

Do you know the nature of the pills that were found by his wife? What were those pills? What were they like?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:08:00

I think I just answered that question. I stated that I'm not going to release the actual medication or who it was prescribed to due to HIPAA.

Reporter | 00:08:03

Were prescription medications or carbon monoxide part of this investigation? Does that rule out carbon monoxide, or is it possible it dissipated from the body and there were still signs of it?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:08:15

I think that's a question for the pathologist. With that information, I'm assuming that at the time of death, they were negative for carbon monoxide, which means to me that it is possibly ruled out.

That's another conversation I think we will have with the pathologist and OMI to make sure that's still not an indication, but it sounds like it's ruled out.

Reporter | 00:08:33

Were there any signs that Betsy was under any form of distress?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:08:45

I don't have that information. Again, I didn't personally see the individuals, so there's no indication that there was any stress. There was no indication of any of that, that I can tell or that I can share, unfortunately.

Reporter | 00:08:55

Sheriff, was there any significance to the space heater being located near her? Any more information about how the dogs died?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:09:00

No, I don't think the space heater has any significance, especially now that we've ruled out carbon monoxide. Unless there's something else that comes back in the toxicology report, we'll look at everything.

We have photographs, and we've documented everything that was close to the body in the room. We'll look at that a little closer, but right now, there's no indication that it has anything to do with it.

Reporter | 00:09:15

Were you able to determine whether they fell or not? Was there any trauma evidence on the bodies to suggest a fall?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:09:28

No, I don't think there was any indication of that. Again, there was no trauma indicated on the body. I'm assuming if they would have fallen or injured themselves, or if there was a head injury or brain injury, that would have been discovered by the pathologist.

Reporter | 00:09:40

Just to follow up, you saw the sunglasses and the cane on the floor according to the reports. That would seem to go against that.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:09:50

You know, that's up to the detective and OMI to work out.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:09:50

I'm going to take two more questions.

Reporter | 00:09:58

Can you say what the space heater was powered by? Was it gas-powered or electric-powered?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:10:05

I don't know that information right off the top of my head.

Reporter | 00:10:10

Sir, how long do you think it will take to have more concrete answers about what happened?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:10:20

Again, we're waiting for the autopsy results and the toxicology. The pathologist shared that some tests were expedited, and she shared that information with me because she thought it was relevant to the case and important for the public to know.

I don't know when the cause and manner of death will be determined officially or when the toxicology results will come back. I'm assuming the pathologist will wait for the toxicology to come back, so that'll help her make her decision about what the cause and manner are.

It could be a month, three months, or longer, in my experience.

Reporter | 00:10:55

When is the last known contact with either Betsy or Gene?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:11:05

That's been one of our challenges because of their privacy. One of the challenges is trying to determine that timeline. I think the event of the pacemaker gives us an idea, but again, we're going to sift through the cell phone records.

We're going to contact workers, maintenance workers, family members, and security. It's a secure subdivision, and there's documented entry and exit. We're working with them to try and determine when the last contact was, and that will help us put together the timeline.

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:11:22

So, thank you, everybody. I hope this answered some questions. Again, if we get more information, we will release that. I know there is concern and interest in Mr. Hackman and Mrs. Arakawa, and I just appreciate your patience. Thank you.

Reporter | 00:11:30

Do you believe the dog died of starvation?

Sheriff Adan Mendoza | 00:11:35

Thank you.