

Indiana University Police Investigating Student's Suicide in Dorm

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Bloomington - Indiana University police are investigating an apparent suicide in a campus dorm room.



Fire crews assembled outside Willkie Residence Center. Dozens of students were evacuated from the dorm. Photo from Matthew Gard

Shortly before 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, campus police officers responded to a report of a possible suicide involving a hazardous material on the third floor of the Willkie Residence Center.

"When they entered the room to check on the welfare of the student, the door was barricaded from the inside," said Chief Jerry Minger, IU Police.

Police pushed into the room, but did not see the student. However, a note was posted on the closet door reading "Warning H₂S" - or hydrogen sulfide. Officers knew that the H₂S warning sign fit a pattern of suicides of young people inhaling the fumes of certain chemicals which, when mixed together in a bucket, form the deadly H₂S.

When fire and HazMat crews arrived, they discovered a body in the closet of the dorm room, along with a bucket of liquid they believed to have been used in a suicide, but the identity of the liquid had not been determined.

Hydrogen sulfide chemical gives off toxic and deadly fumes. There have been news stories recently of people using the chemical to commit suicide and affect others who come to their aid. In Japan, they call H₂S suicides "detergent death," with more than 500 deaths in one year.

Police evacuated the second through fourth floors of the building and contacted the Bloomington Fire Department. More than 50 students spent three hours outside while crews checked for traces of the deadly chemical anywhere in the building. They said no other students were exposed or injured by the chemical.

"We're not allowed to go in for awhile," said one student.

"Every now and then, it just seemed to get a whiff of something. But being inside the building, you couldn't smell it above or below," said another.

The identity of the victim has not yet been released.

"There's been no indication from anyone on the floor that lived near him that he had any problems that would indicate he would do anything like this," said Chief Minger.

Investigators also cordoned off a small area near the room in question, including adjacent dorm rooms. Police took precautions regarding the possible presence of hazardous chemicals, but did not believe there is any danger to others.

Police say there is no indication of foul play.

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