Coroner’s Report Released in Death of Orinda Teen

According to the Contra Costa County forensic pathologist’s report, 16-year old Joseph Loudon died of “asphyxia, due to aspiration of gastric contents due to alcohol and papaverine ingestion,” Sherriff’s Department spokesman Jimmy Lee announced on Wednesday, July 15.

Orinda Police responded to a home on Hillcrest Drive in Orinda the night of May 23, after receiving a report that a young man was intoxicated and unresponsive at a teenage party. Loudon was transported to Kaiser Hospital in Walnut Creek where he was pronounced dead.

Although police initially suspected alcohol poisoning to be the cause of Loudon’s death, the forensic pathologist found that Loudon’s blood alcohol level was “very low.” However, there was a high level of papaverine present.

Loudon’s blood alcohol level was .03, according to Orinda Police Chief William French. As a frame of reference, it is illegal for an adult to drive with a blood alcohol level of .08 or higher.

Papaverine is a prescription opiate which acts as a vasodilator, relaxing veins and arteries to increase blood flow. It is used to treat certain coronary conditions as well as spasms of the intestinal and urinary tract, and sometimes to treat erectile dysfunction; it is sold under the brand names Pavabid and Vasal. Papaverine’s side effects can include nausea and abdominal distress, and patients taking papaverine are warned to use caution when consuming alcohol.

According to French, papaverine is not commonly known as a recreational drug. He also stated that Loudon did not have any prescriptions for medication. At this time, police are unsure how Loudon obtained papaverine, and the investigation into his death is continuing.

Read the full story in our next issue, July 22.

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