

Prosecutors Review Case Involving Chemicals in Restaurant's Tea

BRADY McCOMBS, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The police agency investigating how an industrial cleaning solution ended up in a woman's iced tea at a Utah restaurant, badly burning her throat, is forwarding its findings to prosecutors to determine if anyone should be charged.

No arrests will be made until Salt Lake County Attorney Sim Gill reviews the investigation, South Jordan Cpl. Sam Winkler said Monday. That determination could come as soon as Wednesday.

Police often arrest people on suspicion of a specific charge before handing over the case to prosecutors. But Winkler said this case is unusual because multiple people possibly played a role in what happened.

"We've looked at reckless endangerment to see if it might fit, but it's wide open for them to see what fits," he said. Police were not releasing names, but Winkler said those who could be charged include current or past restaurant employees.

Authorities said a worker at Dickey's Barbecue in South Jordan unintentionally put the heavy-duty cleaner in a sugar bag last month. On Aug. 10, the substance from the bag was mistakenly mixed it into the iced tea dispenser.

Winkler said Monday there have been many different statements from many different people about how the chemical got into the sugar and then remained there for a month.

Gill said he couldn't speak about the case, other than to say his office will carefully review the findings.

The woman who unknowingly drank the sweetened ice tea Aug. 10 has been upgraded to serious condition. Jan Harding, 67, can now talk, albeit in a strained voice, and is also breathing on her own, family attorney Paxton Guyton said.

Harding had been in critical condition since she consumed the tea and was rushed to a hospital. Doctors last week determined she suffered deep, ulcerated burns in her upper esophagus and burns to her mouth.

The cleaning product was meant for degreasing deep fryers and contained the odorless chemical lye, the active ingredient in drain cleaners.

Dickey's Barbecue Restaurants Inc. said in a statement late Friday that it was an isolated incident and nothing like it had happened in the 73 years the Dallas-based

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chain has operated.

The South Jordan eatery remains open after county health officials inspected it and found all chemicals properly labeled and separated from food items.

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