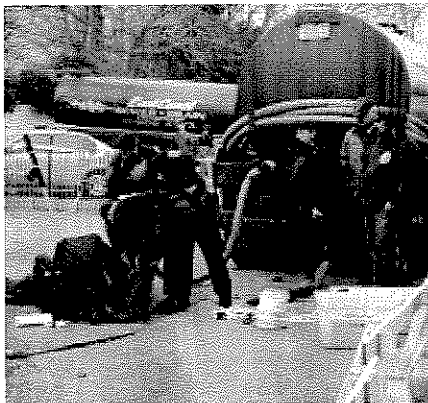


Cops: Metal cover's collapse led to death in cesspool

March 2, 2010 by STACEY ALTHERR AND ANDREW STRICKLER. /
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A collapsing metal cover caused a Central Islip teen's fatal fall into a cesspool behind a Dunkin' Donuts in Smithtown, Suffolk police said Tuesday.

Det. Lt. Gerard Pelkofsky said investigators believe the round, 24-inch-diameter cover gave way under the feet of 17-year-old Amiri Zeqiri as he walked back from dropping off garbage about 7 p.m. Sunday. Police recovered part of the cover that evening. They initially had believed it was missing.

PHOTOS: Central Islip teen falls into cesspool, dies

The remaining pieces were discovered in the tank late Tuesday afternoon during a search by police and Suffolk County Emergency Services crews.

Zeqiri's father, Vesel Zeqiri, stayed inside the doughnut shop Tuesday as workers gathered around the cesspool opening through much of the afternoon. He declined to comment Tuesday, saying he was meeting with investigators.

Two workers from East Coast Sewer and Drain in West Islip drained the cesspool, allowing police to lower a large red magnet and pull chunks of the cover that had fallen into the 18- to 20-foot hole.

Investigators believe "the cover was in place and in some kind of shape that . . . when he stepped on it, it broke apart and he fell in," Pelkofsky said. Roughly half the cover had been removed Sunday by a worker from a nearby pizzeria trying to save Zeqiri, police said.

A review by the county crime lab will try to determine whether the cover was intact and gave way under Zeqiri, or whether it was already cracked or broken and sitting in pieces on the



pipe. The rim of the pipe will be examined to see whether it had been damaged, possibly by a snowplow or other vehicle.

Zeqiri was a Suffolk County Community College student working at the doughnut shop to make extra money. He was working with a 14-year-old cousin when he went to take out the garbage in a rear alley.

After he fell, Zeqiri clung to something in the pipe and screamed for help. He was discovered by his cousin, Faton Zeqiri, who ran for assistance. Amiri Zeqiri was pulled unconscious from the hole later and rushed to St. Catherine of Siena Hospital in Smithtown, where he was pronounced dead at 10:10 p.m.

At the scene Tuesday, a man, who declined to be identified, said he fondly recalled Zeqiri as the Dunkin' Donuts worker who used to prepare his coffee.

Daniel Sullivan, an attorney for Jagir Singh, whose company, JKH Realty Group of Woodside, owns the building housing the doughnut shop, said his client's "thoughts and prayers are with the family."

Sullivan added that Singh has met with town officials and that Singh and his firm pledged to "immediately begin repair work on the property."

With Zachary R. Dowdy

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