# Resident Poisonings Bring Manslaughter, Elder Abuse Charges For Senior Living Worker

An assisted living worker in California has been charged with elder abuse and involuntary manslaughter for unintentionally poisoning three elderly residents. The worker mistakenly served the residents a cleaning solution instead of cranberry juice.

The incident occurred at Atria Park in San Mateo, CA, in August last year. Two of the three residents ultimately succumbed to the poison, while the third survived. The deceased have been identified as Gertrude Elizabeth Murison Maxwell (93) and Peter Schroder Jr. (93). While Maxwell died due to the poison on August 29, Schroder was hospitalized for two weeks before passing away on September 7.

The worker, Alisia Rivera Mendoza, has been charged with three counts of elder abuse and two counts of involuntary manslaughter. She will be brought before the court on May 12. As per a statement provided to NBC Bay Area by Steve Wagstaffe, a San Mateo District Attorney, although Mendoza is remorseful and did not serve the poisonous solution to the elderly residents, there is enough evidence of criminal negligence in this case.

According to a spokeswoman for Atria Senior Living, the company is aware of the charges levied on their former employee. The spokeswoman also assured that the company will continue cooperating with the authorities throughout the legal process.

In their words, “We took immediate action in response to this incident, including reviewing and reinforcing our training and policies on chemical safety.” The spokeswoman also added that the company remains focused on the safety, health, and well-being of all the residents as always.

Schroder’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Atria Park of San Mateo and Atria Senior Living in September last year. They also sued Jennifer Duenas, the community director of the company, as well as Kris Waluszko, Atria’s regional vice president. In their lawsuit, they alleged that the facilities lacked enough staff members and that the current staff members did not possess adequate training.

As per the lawsuit, a kitchen surveillance video showed Mendoza pouring a “heavy-duty bathroom cleaner and disinfectant” into a jug. She then went off to address an issue in the dining room while leaving the liquid in the jug on the kitchen counter. A second employee later picked up the jug and placed it on the breakfast serving counter. The cleaning liquid was mistaken as juice by another employee who poured it into the resident’s glasses.

Another wrongful death and negligence lawsuit was also filed by Maxwell’s family against Atria Park of San Mateo, Atria Senior Living, and Atria Management Co., as well as operator WG Hillsdale SH LP and Duenas. Similar to the other one, this lawsuit also alleged that the lack of adequate staff and sufficient training was the main contributing factor that led to the deaths of the residents. As per the lawsuit, the company’s cost-cutting policies are “part of their scheme to profit from vulnerable adults.”

According to **Santa Rosa elder abuse attorneys**, this isn't the only poisoning incident in an Atria community. A mere four days after Mendoza’s incident, another death due to poisoning took place in a different Atria community. In the latter case, Contra Costa County prosecutors levied felony elder abuse charges against a woman named Lateshia Sherise Starling for allowing an elderly resident to drink cleaning liquid.

The deceased, Constantine Albert Canoun (94), was an Atria Walnut Creek memory care resident with dementia. Canoun was hospitalized after drinking an all-purpose cleaning solution after mistaking it for juice. While Atria Park tried to initially brush away the incident as a food-related negative reaction, the deceased’s family reached out to local media and alleged that he drank cleaning liquid while being unattended during lunch, which led to his death.