



E19 An Unusual Case of Complex Suicide by Nail Gun, Carbon Monoxide, and Ethanol

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The goal of this presentation is to provide attendees with the facts and circumstances surrounding this case of complex suicide as well as develop a better understanding of the dynamics and patterns involved in complex suicides.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing information regarding complex suicides in general, the facts and circumstances of this case of complex suicide involving a nail gun, and will foster a greater level of understanding of the process involved in the investigation of complex suicides.

Complex suicides are those suicides involving more than one mechanism to inflict lethal injury or cause death. These methods can be used simultaneously or sequentially, when a previous method fails to cause death. The case presented here offers information about an unusual case of complex suicide involving a nail gun.

In this case, a 56-year-old male was found dead in his pickup truck by his wife. The scene investigation disclosed a dryer vent hose was used to route the vehicle's exhaust into the cab of the truck. In addition to the dryer hose, a nail gun was found in the cab of the truck. The nail gun was connected to an air compressor located near the truck. The victim had sustained numerous penetrating injuries to the chest and one to the forehead. There was minimal blood discovered during the scene investigation. A review of the victim's medical and mental health history failed to disclose any history of mental illness. Inside the residence, personal papers including copies of life insurance documents, a Bible, and personal belongings arranged neatly on a table support the conclusion that the victim took his own life. The suicide was most likely triggered by discovery of suspected criminal activity on the part of the victim when an audit disclosed that his business accounts contained unexplainable irregularities.

What makes this case unique is the use of a nail gun as a method of inflicting potentially lethal injury in addition to routing engine exhaust into the victim's vehicle and the consumption of large quantities of ethanol. While the use of power hand tools to inflict injury is not rare, a review of the available literature suggests that use of a nail gun used as a method of inflicting injury is very rare, particularly when used in conjunction with carbon monoxide and ethanol poisoning. In this case, the cause of death was clearly established, penetrating trauma by the nails to the chest and head. A review of the case facts demonstrates how a careful scene investigation and a complete forensic autopsy can help clarify the circumstances of any equivocal death, particularly suspected suicides.

Complex Suicide, Suicide, Nail Gun