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Report: Alcohol may have played role in drowning

SEP 1, 2006   BY **JOSH KRYSAK**   *2 MIN READ*   f   X   ✉   🖨

Alcohol might have contributed to the death of a Point Marion man who drowned Aug. 22 in the Monongahela River, according to toxicology reports. William Gardner, 32, had a blood-alcohol content (BAC) of .382 when he fell from a boat into the river around 7 p.m., according to Fayette County Coroner Dr. Phillip E. Reilly.

Gardner's BAC was more than enough to impair his ability to swim, according to officials.

Fayette County Deputy Coroner Marisa Springer pronounced Gardner dead at the scene at 9:26 p.m. in Point Marion.

An autopsy conducted by Allegheny County forensic pathologist Dr. Cyril Wecht revealed the cause of death as drowning, according to Springer.

The Investigating officer, trooper Jerome Venick, said that the high alcohol level in Gardner's system could have impaired his ability to swim, noting that he was nearly four times over the legal alcohol limit.

Venick said Thursday that even the best swimmer would be affected by the high amount of alcohol.

Point Marion Volunteer Fire Department River Rescue responded to the river around 7:10 p.m. after reports of a man falling from a stalled boat near the fire station.

Officials at the scene said observers threw a life preserver toward Gardner, but he was unable to grasp it as he struggled in the water.

Firefighters scoured the river from two rescue boats as divers suited up to search the calm water near what crews called "the point", about 300 yards from the Point Marion Bridge.

After searching for about 30 minutes, divers pulled Gardner's body from the water around 8 p.m.

Venick said the investigation is ongoing.

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