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## FATALITY ON THE STRIP: Electrocutation death probed

### Victim's brother promises legal action

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Frayed underground wiring, an ill-timed summer thunderstorm and open-toed shoes might have combined to electrocute a Kentucky tourist and mother of four Saturday while she crossed the Strip, authorities said Monday.

"This is the first accident like this I've ever heard of," said Bobby Shelton, a spokesman for Clark County's Public Works Department, which has jurisdiction over the underground traffic signal wiring that apparently killed Rebecca "Becky" Longhoffer, 39, about 9:30 p.m. Saturday.

The Louisville, Ky., resident, who was visiting Las Vegas with her fiance, died when she stepped on a cast iron plate covering the electrical wiring, authorities said. The plate had been soaked by a heavy downpour and was covered by a puddle several inches deep when Longhoffer stepped on it.

Her family has vowed to sue the county. The coroner's office ruled her death an accident.

"Evidently, one of the metal ribs in the box was making contact with the wiring," Shelton said, stressing that the exact cause of the incident is under investigation. "The best that we can figure out at this point, over the years, with thousands of people walking on it, the wires were worn down to where they were bare."

He said an underground box containing the wiring, on an island at the intersection of Spring Mountain Road and Las Vegas Boulevard, near Treasure Island, is one of as many as 70,000 to 100,000 throughout the county's jurisdiction that feed the valley's traffic signals.

The box had not been inspected since work on those traffic signals had been completed in late 1995 or early 1996, he said. He said no one routinely inspects any of the similar electrical boxes throughout the county.

"I don't have the manpower to go out and inspect each and every one of them, nor the funding," he said. "I don't know how we could have fixed something that we didn't know needed fixing."

In light of Saturday's death, however, the county will inspect all similar traffic signal wiring boxes on the Strip in the coming days, Shelton said.

That's not good enough for Fain Brooks, who said he and his sister had spoken only a moment before her death Saturday night.

"I promise you, Las Vegas will remember my sister," Brooks said by telephone Monday afternoon from his home in Kentucky. "They're going to pay dearly. I promise you that. The only way they could stop me is to kill me."

The city of Las Vegas does not routinely inspect its underground traffic signal wiring boxes either, said Neva Evans, the city's assistant traffic manager.

"We don't have the manpower," she said, estimating that the city has about 16,000 of the same type of electrical boxes that was involved in Saturday's incident.

She said rules that came into place in the late 1990s require new versions of the electrical boxes. The cast-iron lids now must be grounded so they will not pass along an electrical charge.

Shelton said that rule is true in the county, too, but he was not sure whether the box in question fell under those rules. He said covers made of lighter materials can float away in a rainstorm, leaving the wiring completely uncovered.

Shelton said the electrical problem did not short any circuit breakers, and the county received no reports of any traffic signals in the area being affected, either.

"We're still looking at this particular box to see what happened," he said. He declared the box repaired and safe, however.

Brooks, the dead woman's brother, said he intended to pursue legal action against the county because he wants all such electrical boxes to be covered with something that will not conduct electricity. He would like such a rule to be known as "Becky's Law," he said.

Brooks described his sister as "the best mother in the world" and said she had arrived in Las Vegas on Thursday with her fiance, who was playing in a billiards tournament.

The siblings were very close, he said, in large part because Longhoffer's mother had died when she was 12 years old.

He said his little sister had never been to Las Vegas before, and she was disheartened early in her trip when she lost \$60 gambling in only a few moments.

"I'd be better off shopping," he said she told him later that evening.

That's what she did Saturday afternoon, Brooks said. She walked up and down the Strip from the Riviera, where she was staying. She bought a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, two souvenir shot glasses, a keychain for her youngest child and several other trinkets, he said.

She was about to go into Treasure Island to use the restroom when she was killed.

"I'm walking across the street right now," Longhoffer told her brother on her cell phone. "I'll call you later."

Authorities said witnesses reported that Longhoffer fell face-first into the puddle. When they tried to pull her out, they were turned away by an obvious electrical charge in the puddle.

One man was able to pull her free using a belt, but emergency personnel were unable to revive her. Though police reported Longhoffer was not wearing shoes, Brooks said his sister would never walk along the street barefoot. Shelton said county employees reported she was wearing open-toed shoes.

The coroner's office said Longhoffer's official cause of death will not be determined until results of routine toxicology tests are complete, probably in a week or two.

In the meantime, Brooks said, he will be kept busy for the next two days planning his sister's funeral. She left behind four children, ages 22, 15, 12 and 13 months, he said.

"I've already cried enough," he said. "Now, I'm getting mad. I am mad."

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## Tourist electrocuted walking barefoot in rain storm

**LAS VEGAS, Nevada (AP) --A tourist was electrocuted near a Las Vegas Strip casino during a weekend rain storm.**

Rebecca Longhoffer, 39, of Louisville, Ky., was walking across a median near the Treasure Island hotel-casino late Saturday when she stepped on a wet traffic signal wiring box and collapsed, authorities said.

Clark County Public Works spokesman Bobby Shelton said a worn wire inside the traffic box may have caused a short circuit.

The victim was not wearing shoes, police Lt. Chuck Mangrum said.

Longhoffer, a computer programmer and mother of four, was visiting Las Vegas with her fiance, who was playing in a billiards tournament.

She was pronounced dead at a hospital.

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