Body Parts Found At Medical Waste Company

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KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP) — Officials in Kansas have been trying to identify several body parts, including six heads, found in a truck at a medical waste company.

The body parts were found last week in 12 large red plastic tubs inside a delivery truck at Stericycle Inc., a company that disposes of medical waste.

The tubs each had shipping labels saying they came from The Learning Center, which is affiliated with a New Mexico company, Bio Care. Bio Care, according to its Web site, is also referred to as Bio Care Southwest, and distributes bodies for medical research and education.

A Bio Care spokesman, who identified himself only as Paul, said Tuesday his company was not involved "at all." Paul Montano is listed as the owner of Bio Care.

"Everybody uses Stericycle in the medical field," he said. "I guess what happened, they linked it coming out of this area. But it could have come from Texas, El Paso. ...

"As far as Bio Care is concerned, all of our body parts are accounted for."

A Stericycle spokeswoman said the company wasn't commenting.

Wyandotte County coroner Dr. Alan C. Hancock has been working to identify the body parts.

"They're not supposed to be sending bodies here," Hancock said. "They're supposed to be cremating them, putting them in urns and giving them to the family."

Police in Kansas City, Kan., and Albuquerque referred all calls to Hancock, who said Stericycle employees first became concerned a few weeks ago when they found a head in their incineration facility. The company, which disposes of medical waste such as operating room debris or syringes, does not incinerate major body parts, Hancock said.

The company notified police and said the head was part of a shipment from The Learning Center. Police then told Stericycle to notify them when the next shipment from the center arrived. That was March 22, Hancock said.

Police opened the tubs, which contained sealed medical waste bags containing the body parts.

Hancock said so far he has identified three individuals: two men and one woman. He wouldn't release their names, but said the woman was identified through her dentures and was from the Southwest U.S.

Hancock said he was able to find a death certificate based on a medical identification tag found on an arm. The certificate said the man had been cremated.

The Albuquerque funeral director Hancock spoke with Tuesday told him that man's body had been delivered in a sealed box from Bio Care — standard procedure when Bio Care finished harvesting a body for research, Hancock said.

He said the entire box would then be sent to the crematorium.

"There's a death certificate that says they cremated something," Hancock said. "I have a guy who's supposed to have been cremated by a funeral home in Albuquerque in September."

Amy Boule, director of operations for the Office of Medical Investigators in Albuquerque, said Montano is an on-call deputy medical investigator for her office. On-call investigators respond to reports of dead bodies. They can declare someone dead, take photos and interview next of kin to help recreate circumstances for the agency, she said.

"But whatever he did or didn't do as the owner of Bio Care has nothing to do with his on-call job with OMI," she said.

Boule also said she was unaware of New Mexico regulations regarding transporting body parts, and that some families who signed up with Bio Care might not have wanted the remaining body parts cremated.

"Who knows if the families were fully informed ... and if they gave permission ... and if all the paperwork is in order, then it may seem weird, but it's better than dumping them in the regular trash."

"It's still creepy that suddenly these buckets of body parts show up," she said. "Generally, there must be something wrong with this, but I don't know what the regulations are."

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