

Police: Infant was alive when put in river

By JAMES RICKETTS
Clarion-Ledger Gulf Coast Bureau

PASCAGOULA — An unidentified infant found dead last week in the Pascagoula River was alive when she was placed in the water, authorities said Thursday.

"As far as I am concerned, it is a homicide," said Capt. Charles Polifrone, chief of detectives in the Jackson County Sheriff's Department.

The exact cause of death is pending the outcome of more tests, Polifrone said.

Jackson County Coroner Dave Miller said he was notified Thursday morning by Dr. Paul McGarry, a forensic pathologist in New Orleans, that the infant had

minute particles of sand in her lungs. The only way to get sand in one's lungs, Miller said, is to inhale it.

The 3- to 5-week-old infant was found June 29 by fishermen in a swampy area of the Pascagoula River. The baby was buried Saturday alongside a still-identified 18-month-old child found nearly six years ago in eastern Jackson County.

On Thursday, investigators began comparing the infant's footprints with those of more than 60 females born at Ocean Springs Hospital within the past month. Polifrone said officials will continue their comparison efforts today at Singing River Hospital in Pascagoula.

"We are just doing everything we can to find out who this child is and who did it," Miller said.

One of the methods, he said, has been to seek publicity concerning the case in hopes that someone who noticed "some girl who was pregnant but doesn't have a baby now" will start asking questions.

Law enforcement officials, the primary group of mourners at the infant's graveside services, also are taking the case more personally than many investigations they handle.

"If I find them, I will personally sign the affidavit," Polifrone said of the person or people involved in the infant's death.

Whoever put the infant in the river could face life in prison if convicted, Polifrone said, but if they turned themselves in, it might be in their best interest.

Unknown infant was alive when thrown in river

JACKSON COUNTY BUREAU

■ PASCAGOULA — The infant girl found dead in the Pascagoula River last week was alive when she was abandoned in the river, officials said Thursday.

Jackson County coroner Dave Miller said a continuing study of data gathered during an autopsy has determined that the 3- to-5-week-old infant died, probably by drowning, while she was in the river. Specialists knew the baby was alive because sand was found in her lungs. Her identity has not been determined.

Further studies are being conducted at the coroner's office by forensic specialist Paul McGarry in New Orleans.

The infant's nude body was found entangled in trotlines in the river June 28 by two fishermen about a mile south of the bridge, which spans the river on Mississippi 614.

The Jackson County Sheriff's Department has been conducting an extensive search of area hospital records to determine the baby's identity.

The baby was white, with brown hair, blue-gray eyes and weighed about six pounds.

Because of the isolated location where the body was found, officials think the little girl was born in Jackson County.