



**Report to the Minister of Justice  
and Solicitor General  
Public Fatality Inquiry**

*Fatality Inquiries Act*

WHEREAS a Public Inquiry was held at the \_\_\_\_\_ Courthouse  
in the \_\_\_\_\_ Hamlet of \_\_\_\_\_ Red Earth Creek, in the Province of Alberta,  
(City, Town or Village) (Name of City, Town, Village)  
on the \_\_\_\_\_ 12th day of \_\_\_\_\_ October, \_\_\_\_\_ 2017, (and by adjournment  
year  
on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_),  
year  
before \_\_\_\_\_ D. R. Shynkar, a Provincial Court Judge,  
into the death of \_\_\_\_\_ Sammy George Alook \_\_\_\_\_ 29  
(Name in Full) (Age)  
of \_\_\_\_\_ South Tall Cree, Alberta \_\_\_\_\_ and the following findings were made:  
(Residence)

**Date and Time of Death:** \_\_\_\_\_ May 11, 2015 \_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_ Near Red Earth Creek, Alberta \_\_\_\_\_

**Medical Cause of Death:**

("cause of death" means the medical cause of death according to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death as last revised by the International Conference assembled for that purpose and published by the World Health Organization – *Fatality Inquiries Act*, Section 1(d)).

Methanol toxicity

**Manner of Death:**

("manner of death" means the mode or method of death whether natural, homicidal, suicidal, accidental, unclassifiable or undeterminable – *Fatality Inquiries Act*, Section 1(h)).

Accidental

**Circumstances under which Death occurred:**

Sammy Alook was a 29 year old father of two children, living in South Tall Cree, Alberta, with his common law wife. Sammy had been visiting Trout Lake, staying at the home of his father, Leo Alook, for a few days. Among other things, he had been cutting and peeling fence posts for use at his home in South Tall Cree.

On May 10, 2015, Sammy had been drinking near some trailers by the air strip in Trout Lake. His brother, Robbie Alook, checked on Sammy a number of times that afternoon and evening, and found him apparently very drunk, and sleeping at times; at perhaps 9 p.m., Robbie convinced Sammy to come with him to their father's home; Robbie dropped Sammy off there.

Sammy seemed very drunk. He slept for a few hours, but early on the morning of May 11, he was up again, complaining of thirst, staggering and banging around the house. The noise woke his father and his brother, Bobbie. Bobbie was annoyed, because he had to be up early in the morning for work; there was an altercation between the two. Leo was concerned over the friction between his sons; he called the RCMP to have them remove Sammy, shortly after 3 a.m.

RCMP dispatch contacted the officer on call, Cst. David MacInnis, at the nearest detachment, Red Earth. The constable spoke by telephone to Leo Alook, and after waiting approximately 30 minutes to see if Sammy would go to sleep (his father thought he might), Cst. MacInnis called Leo again, and then drove the hour or so to Leo's home.

Cst. MacInnis observed that Sammy appeared to be very intoxicated by alcohol. Leo told him his son sometimes used prescription drugs, but had no information on whether he had been using them that day. The constable confirmed that Sammy was interfering with the use of the home by Leo and Bobby, and arrested him for mischief. Sammy was placed in the back of the police vehicle with the assistance of Bobby. He did not resist, and was not handcuffed, but appeared grossly intoxicated. The constable noted no paraphernalia, pills, or other signs of drug use during the arrest. Although the constable had some experience with, or knowledge of, people in the community occasionally abusing beverage alcohol substitutes, such as mouthwash, hairspray, or fragrances, the very distinct smells associated with that type of substance abuse were not present; Sammy smelled as if he had been consuming beverage alcohol, and exhibited signs consistent with extreme intoxication from that cause.

Cst MacInnis learned that Leo had called for an ambulance while waiting for the RCMP, as he had gradually become concerned that there was something wrong with his son beyond alcohol intoxication. The constable considered that the ambulance would be coming from Red Earth, and that it would be most efficient for him to transport Sammy and meet the ambulance on the road. By this time, the constable felt that Sammy's level of intoxication merited a review by medical personnel to determine if Sammy could be safely incarcerated, given that Sammy could not walk on his own, and was not verbalizing other than in grunts; this was in accordance with RCMP policy covering the arrest and incarceration of apparently injured or intoxicated persons.

The first ambulance Cst. MacInnis encountered turned out to be headed for a call on a pregnant woman. When Cst. MacInnis met the ambulance sent for Sammy a few minutes later, just outside the neighboring community of Peerless Lake, the EMTs, Philip Martin and Kalli Fuhrer, assessed Sammy. The information they had, relayed to them from the constable, was that Sammy was a prescription drug user at times, but there was no specific information regarding drug consumption. Their assessment indicated that his condition was stable, consistent with alcohol intoxication, and that he could safely be transported to the detachment cells and lodged there. They noted no signs of drug consumption. Cst. MacInnis continued toward Red Earth with Sammy in the back.

On the gravel road between Trout Lake and highway 88, Cst. MacInnis could hear grunts and groans from Sammy in the back of the vehicle, and then snoring. Once on the pavement of highway 88, the snoring was clearer. Cst. MacInnis intended to stop for fuel a short distance north of the detachment, but found the cardlock was not functioning. He went to another fuel station, and when he got out of the vehicle he opened the back door to check on Sammy. Sammy was quiet and unresponsive. He determined that Sammy was not breathing, and he could not detect a pulse.

Cst. MacInnis considered that both community ambulances were north of him, in the Peerless Lake and Trout Lake area, having just encountered them both, and he believed the ambulance sent for Sammy should be coming right behind him. He knew the ambulance had an AED (automated external defibrillator), and he felt that its immediate use by the EMTs would be the most effective treatment for Sammy. He drove the very short distance back to the turn off to Trout Lake, expecting to meet the ambulance, but at the corner, where he could see some distance down the gravel road, there was no sign of it. He stopped and immediately began CPR.

Bobby, on his way to work in Slave Lake, arrived, Cst. MacInnis flagged him down, and they both performed CPR on Sammy until the ambulance arrived, five or ten minutes later. The EMTs performed CPR on Sammy, using their equipment and in consultation with a doctor by telephone. The nearest hospital was in Slave Lake, perhaps an hour and a half away. The efforts of Cst. MacInnis, Bobby Alook, and the EMTs were to no avail; Sammy could not be revived.

A subsequent toxicology report indicated high levels of methanol and of formates (metabolized products of methanol) in Sammy's blood. The levels of methanol were three times what is considered to be potentially life-threatening; the levels of formates exceeded the levels usually associated with fatalities attributable to methanol overdose. The Chief Medical Examiner found no other explanation for Sammy's death, and concluded that Sammy had died of methanol toxicity.

Subsequent inquiries and investigations suggested that Sammy may have consumed an automotive fluid or perhaps a liquid deodorant, but exactly what he consumed, when, or with whom, could not be confirmed.

#### Evidence Received

1. Oral evidence (by CCTV):

Cst. Dan MacInnis, EMT Philip Martin, and Deputy Chief Toxicologist Dr. Craig Chatterton.

2. Medical Examiner Evidence :

Certificate of Medical Examiner  
Toxicology Report  
Confidential Autopsy Report and Narrative

3. EMS Records

4. RCMP Records:

Map  
Relevant RCMP policies, including assessing prisoner responsiveness

Occurrence Summary  
NAOCC Dispatch records  
Ambulance Dispatch records  
Warned statements of Leo Alook, Robbie Alook, Valerie Sinclair, Bobby Alook, Cst. MacInnis, Kalli Fuhrer, and Philip Martin  
Notes of Cst. MacInnis  
Scene measurements  
Red Earth detachment report  
IDENT occurrence report  
Supplementary occurrence report  
General report and General Occurrence report of Cst. MacInnis  
Investigative report of Sgt. Giles  
Memorandums of Sgt. Brandford and of Insp. Peterson  
Email, Greg Stannard to Mike Brandford  
Investigative report

**Recommendations for the prevention of similar deaths:**

Considerations arising from the evidence

Dr. Chatterton's evidence included the opinion that distinguishing between two individuals, one intoxicated by ethanol and the other by methanol, on the basis of simple observation of symptoms would be extremely difficult; the most obvious symptom might be vision impairment in the person intoxicated by methanol (although the Court observes that it is well known that some vision impairment is common in persons intoxicated by ethanol as well).

Dr. Chatterton testified that the smells of pure ethanol and pure methanol are not readily distinguishable, and that there is no clearly identifiable feature of methanol intoxication apparent to an observer unequipped with special diagnostic tools. In fact, he opined that even in an ER environment some delay would be expected while blood testing was completed, before methanol intoxication could be confirmed, while cautioning that detailed knowledge of an ER environment is not strictly within the realm of his expertise.

Dr. Chatterton also testified that methanol toxicity rates, as reflected in its presence in investigations undertaken by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, is relatively rare; perhaps 10 instances per year throughout Alberta, in the context of perhaps 2500 toxicity investigations.

While Constable MacInnis and the EMTs had some sparse information regarding possible prescription drug use, there was no information available to them, or observations that could be made, to indicate methanol consumption. Neither the constable nor the EMTs had encountered it before, in that community or elsewhere, and had no specific reason to suspect it.

While the use of the AED was not immediate, there is no evidence to suggest that the outcome would have differed had the RCMP vehicle been equipped with a device. Neither is there evidence to suggest that the outcome would have differed had the constable elected to immediately begin CPR rather than driving several kilometers to the junction; in any event, that decision was a judgment call appropriately made by the constable in the context of the emergent situation before him. Finally, it is no more than speculative that the outcome would have been different had Sammy been in the ambulance when he suffered a cardiac arrest, but in any event, the evidence does not support the contention that Sammy ought to have been transported by ambulance to the nearest hospital, rather than left with Cst. MacInnis, based on the information

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and observations available to the constable and the EMTs at the time.

I find on the basis of the evidence and the considerations arising from it, that there are no recommendations I can make that might reasonably be expected to prevent similar deaths.

DATED October 24, 2017 ,

at High Prairie , Alberta.

*Original signed*

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D.R. Shynkar, a Judge of the Provincial  
Court of Alberta