



Fresno County Sheriff - Coroner's Office

Margaret Mims, Sheriff - Coroner

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News Release

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Father and Daughter Drown in San Joaquin River

On June 2, 2018, just before 5:30 pm, Fresno County Sheriff's dispatchers received an emergency call saying a man and a young girl had been swept away in the San Joaquin River. Deputies and our EAGLE One helicopter responded to the area where they were last seen, which was at the intersection of San Mateo Rd. and the river in Mendota. Deputies arrived and found several people in the water searching for the man and child. They learned that a Fresno family was there to go swimming and fishing. As the adults were setting up items on the shore, four children ran out to a sandbar in the shallow water. As they were playing, the current of the river took the kids downstream. The adults jumped into the water and were able to pull three of the children out. 33 year old Alejandro Valencia was able to grab hold of his four year old daughter, Emily Lopez, but the two went underwater and never resurfaced.

Deputies with swift water rescue training checked the river, but were unable to find Valencia and Lopez. Members of the Sheriff's Dive Team responded to join the search. Shortly before 9:30 pm, divers found Valencia and Lopez deceased at the bottom of the river, about 50 feet away from the original sandbar. It was discovered that no one in the group knew how to swim.

The Sheriff's Office would like to remind the public to be safe in and around water and to take simple measures to protect themselves.

- 1) Wear a life jacket. Make sure children have one that fits them properly.**
- 2) Stay close to shore if you are not an experienced swimmer.**
- 3) Parents should watch their children at all times.**
- 4) Do not mix alcohol and swimming. Alcohol causes swimmers to fatigue faster than normal and can create dangerous situations.**
- 5) Understand that when it's extremely hot outside you will get tired faster than usual.**
- 6) Respect the water. The temperature of the water remains cold and the current is often stronger than it appears. There can be debris in the water, which is difficult to see and may cause hazardous situations for swimmers. Be careful of the mud on the bottom of lakes and rivers, it's easy to sink in some spots and get your feet stuck.**