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## Prosecutor files hazing charges in student death



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### [Father Of Victim Reacts To Hazing Charges](#)

George Starks' 18-year-old son Michael, a freshman at Utah state, died at the Sigma Nu Fraternity house a little over a month ago.

"It's a tough deal. Even though you have 6 kids, it's tough losing one," George said. "The ones who had control over this and could have stopped it, chose not to."

George says Utah State University's administration looked the other way to a history of hazing problems at the school.

George says the fraternity organized the hazing during which Michael was bound with duct tape, told to strip down, while sorority girls force fed him vodka.

Michael passed out and died, his blood alcohol level 4-times the legal limit.

George says Michael's own friends let him down.

"Kids make poor decisions, but one would have hoped that within this group of students that Michael had placed so much trust and faith in, that not one of them could have contacted the authorities in due time to save his life," George said.

Felony charges have now been filed against both the Sigma Nu Fraternity, and the Chi Omega Sorority.

12 students have also been charged with misdemeanors-- including the Sigma Nu President.

A grieving father says it's not enough.

"I would have liked to see charges against the school administration despite the nice soothing letters they sent out, which are very kind, but it would have been more kind if they would have made us aware prior to this whole thing happening that there was a danger zone there," George said.

George regrets people at the university never truly got to know the real Michael, a handsome young man with dreams of becoming a firefighter.

A life cut short in an initiation a father says should never have happened.

"It was our son this time, it could have easily been someone else," George said.

Additional story from the Associated Press

LOGAN, Utah (AP) - Cache County prosecutors have filed hazing charges against a Utah State fraternity and sorority in the Nov. 21 death of an 18-year-old freshman who died of alcohol poisoning.

The Utah State chapters of the Sigma Nu fraternity and Chi Omega sorority were each charged Friday with one count of third-degree felony hazing for their involvement with the death of Michael Starks. Misdemeanor hazing charges were also filed against 12 students, including the USU chapter president of Sigma Nu.

Starks' blood alcohol content was higher than 0.35 the day he died, more than four times the legal limit to drive an



Utah State university freshman Michael Starks died Friday likely from alcohol poisoning.

automobile.

A probable cause document says that Starks and another pledge were "kidnapped" by sorority women, bound with duct tape, taken to an off-campus residence, told to "strip to their underwear," painted blue and white and given vodka.

Cache County Attorney George Daines said that while it is unusual, organizations can be charged in criminal cases.

"You obviously can't put the entity in jail, but you can affect their corporate nature and their ability to continue to act as an association or an entity," he said.

The students face a year in jail if convicted, while punishment for the chapters is unclear.

Utah State has already suspended Chi Omega and Sigma Nu's activities.

The Starks family said it was thrilled that felony charges were filed.

"It reflects the seriousness of the situation," Starks' father, George Starks, told The Salt Lake Tribune. "The fraternity has to be held accountable. It's a system, a machine that envelops the kids. Any one of those kids could have said, 'Wait a minute, this isn't a good thing.'"

The Herald Journal of Logan reported that the probable cause statement says Starks was not forced to drink the alcohol the evening of his death and that subsequent investigations suggested Starks had consumed alcohol on several previous occasions.

Utah's hazing statute allows for charges to be filed even if the victim consents to the abuse as long as the person is younger than 21.

Cache County Attorney George Daines said previous pledges underwent similar initiation ceremonies.

"There was a pattern of activity; they established a tradition of doing this sort of thing," Daines said. "It became part of their initiation rights."

Whitney K. Miller, a Chi Omega member, told detectives she was involved with capturing Starks.

"The plan was to have the two pledges come to the sorority house, capture them, take them to an off-campus house, paint them and wait for the other pledges to rescue them," she told investigators.

Charges say sorority women held bottles of vodka to the pledges' mouths because their hands were tied.

Miller was charged with supplying alcohol to a minor and misdemeanor hazing.

Authorities said Starks eventually passed out at Sigma Nu's residence and other pledges were told to give him water, put him on his side and watch over him.

Starks was found not breathing early in the morning and pronounced dead at a local hospital after paramedics couldn't revive him.

Sigma Nu Executive Director Brad Beacham and Chi Omega's national executive director Anne Emmerth declined to comment until they read the charges.

Associated Press and Four Points