

MGM Grand bypassed 911 after showroom accident



Vicente Rodriguez

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Death in a Showroom

Fatal plunge by stagehand stirs questions of safety, fines

'Paul Rodriguez and The Whole Enchilada'

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When stage rigger Vicente Rodriguez last year fell almost 40 feet to his death in a showroom on the Strip, the hotel's security office did not dial 911, according to the Metropolitan Police Department office that processes emergency calls.

Best practice in an emergency is to dial 911, not a back-channel number, according to county and health district representatives who plan and monitor emergency medical services.

Instead, the MGM Grand seems to have directly dialed American Medical Response, a private ambulance company, which transported Rodriguez, 20, to the hospital.

Bypassing 911 removed police from the equation. That means no police report, which could be a source of information for possible litigation, ever was created.

A half hour after Rodriguez's fall, the hotel dialed 311, a nonemergency number, to notify police of the accident, which happened May 20, 2009. According to the times given in police and hospital records, University Medical Center's trauma unit pronounced Rodriguez dead while the 311 call was still in progress.

The Police Department's 311 record contradicts the MGM Grand's own incident report, which says, "911 contacted at 2223 hours."

Rodriguez fell at 10:22 p.m. Police logged the 311 call as starting at 10:51 p.m.

The hotel has declined to discuss the accident or its aftermath, which resulted in safety fines for both the MGM Grand and Rhino Las Vegas, a rigging company that hired Rodriguez for a one-night job at the hotel.

The hotel report is part of the file compiled when the Nevada Occupational Safety & Health Administration investigated the accident.

"We discourage that," bypassing 911, for several reasons, said Mike Harwell, a Clark County official who sits on the oversight committee for fire and medical emergency dispatch. Rory Chetalat of the Southern Nevada Health District's office agreed.

A key reason is the shorter arrival time for fire department paramedics, compared with the required response time for private ambulances. The Southern Nevada dispatch system is called "dual response," in that a 911 call triggers two crews to an accident: one fire department paramedic team to stabilize the injured at the scene and one private team to take the injured to a hospital.

In the Rodriguez case, paramedics were on the scene in six minutes. Both AMR and Clark County Fire Department units arrived at 10:28 p.m., according to the hotel's incident report.

The franchise agreement governing the two local private ambulance companies requires them to respond if their offices receive a direct emergency phone call; as well, the private companies must then send an electronic message to the office that dispatches fire and paramedic units.

Harwell said government officials who work in emergency response have been educating the public for at least the past decade to call only 911. Formerly, when the Las Vegas Valley had only one private ambulance company, hotels sometimes dialed the company direct.

"I think 911 would be easier to remember than a seven-digit (phone) number," Harwell added.

An "old-school" MGM Grand employee might have called AMR instead of 911, Harwell theorized. But employees at several Strip hotels told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that if they dial 911 on a hotel phone or hotel radio, it connects them with the hotel's security office, which then decides how to place the call to outside authorities.

Although Rodriguez's fatal fall happened more than a year ago, details have just started coming out.

In June, the Nevada Occupational Safety & Health Administration settled with Rhino Las Vegas, the MGM subcontractor for whom Rodriguez was working when he died of a snapped neck. Nevada OSHA settled a related case with the hotel itself in late 2009. MGM Grand and Rhino Las Vegas paid a total of \$23,800 in OSHA penalties.

The victim's mother, Marychris Rodriguez, began to discuss the accident publicly only recently. In the spring, she filed a complaint with federal OSHA that the Nevada agency did not adequately investigate the death, which occurred while her son was helping take down and pack equipment for the Tom Jones show, which had finished a run.

Rhino Las Vegas has declined to discuss the accident.

The victim's mother said she has requested records from both AMR and the fire-medical dispatch office for Southern Nevada -- which is downtown at Las Vegas Fire & Rescue headquarters -- in hopes of understanding the details of the dispatch and transportation that occurred after his accident.

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