

Violations — but pool reopened

N. Hempstead yet to remedy fire safety issues

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Town of North Hempstead officials opened the newly renovated pool at Clinton G. Martin Park in New Hyde Park in June despite being issued violations by the Nassau Fire Marshal's office for missing equipment, and still have not corrected the violations, said officials from the fire marshal's office.

Fire marshals visited the pool on June 29, the day before its scheduled reopening, and noticed workers were installing a fire alarm system, fire detection system and water sprinkler system that hadn't been tested or approved by the fire marshal, said Michael Uttaro, Nassau County assistant chief fire mar-

shal. Fire marshals said town workers were told the pool should not be opened without either of the systems functioning.

"There are a lot of combustible components in there [the pool], and you need it [a fire alarm] to notify occupants if there's a situation where they need to evacuate," Uttaro said Wednesday about the structure at the pool.

On June 29, the fire marshal cited the town for two violations for failure to install the fire alarm and sprinkler systems. The fire marshal's office has assessed no fines for the noncompliance.

Supervisor Judi Bosworth did not respond to questions about the fire alarm and sprinkler systems, but the town issued a statement Wednesday.

"The pool was opened with a fire watch system in place, which is permissible and safe," spokeswoman Carole Trotter said. "The contractors are still on site finishing up. The fire alarm and sprinkler systems will



The fire marshal's office on June 29 found violations at the renovated pool at Clinton G. Martin Park.

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be completed before they leave."

The town's building department issued a certificate of occupancy that allowed the pool to open. Uttaro said Thursday that it is troubling that fire marshals issued the violation in June and that the town still hasn't had the fire alarms tested and approved.

Uttaro said the fire marshal's office has set no deadline for the town to address the violations and acknowledged that because the certificate of occupancy has already been issued, the fire and water sprinkler systems could go

unapproved for the remainder of the summer while the pool — which closes for the season on Sept. 3 — remains open. Until all three systems are approved, the company the town hired to install the systems has assigned staffers to monitor the site.

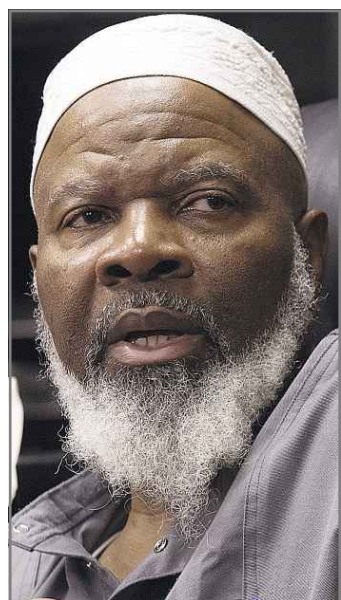
"A 24-hour human fire watch is an accepted fire safety system used while the fire suppression system is being completed," said Victor Thomas, deputy commissioner of the town's public works department. "This has been an acceptable practice in the past and the

town would never risk the safety of its residents, employees and its facilities."

Uttaro said marshals typically issue a dozen missing fire alarm violations per year for retail and residential buildings, but it's "super rare" that they issue one for a town or village.

"It's not a normal, daily occurrence that we have to tell a municipality that 'Hey, you're in violation,'" he said. "But, to be fair to the town, I know that they were under intense pressure from constituents to get that pool opened."

Grandfather: Remains at N.M. compound are missing boy



Siraj Wahhaj, boy's grandfather

The Associated Press

TAOS, N.M. — A severely disabled Georgia boy authorities say was kidnapped by his father and marked for an exorcism was found buried at a compound in the New Mexico desert that has been the focus of investigators for the past week, the toddler's grandfather said Thursday.

New Mexico authorities, however, said they had yet to identify the remains, discovered Monday. And prosecutors said they were awaiting word on the cause of death before deciding on any charges.

The boy, Abdul-ghani Wahhaj, would have turned 4 Monday. Prosecutors said he was snatched from his mother in December in Jonesboro, Georgia.

The search for him led authorities to New Mexico, where 11

hungry children and a youngster's remains were found in recent days at a ramshackle compound shielded by old tires, wooden pallets and an earthen wall studded with broken glass.

The missing boy's grandfather, Siraj Wahhaj, a Muslim cleric who leads a well-known New York City mosque, said he had learned from other family members that the remains were his grandson's. The imam said he didn't know the cause of death.

"Whoever is responsible, then that person should be held accountable," Wahhaj said.

In an interview with WSB-TV in Atlanta, the boy's mother, Hakima Ramzi, also called for justice as she described how her life had been taken from her after her son was abducted by his father, which she said was out of character for him. She and

Siraj Ibn Wahhaj, the imam's son, had been married almost 14 years.

"I wasn't able to save my son," she told the television station.

Ramzi, who is from Morocco, filed for divorce in December — the same month neighbors say Siraj Ibn Wahhaj and others arrived in Amalia, New Mexico.

A Georgia arrest warrant accused him of kidnapping his child. Authorities said the father at some point told his wife he wanted to perform an exorcism on the boy, who suffered constant seizures and required constant attention because of a lack of oxygen and blood flow at birth.

The child's father was among five adults arrested on suspicion of child abuse in the raid at the compound. In court papers, prosecutors also said the father had been training children there to

carry out school shootings.

Speaking at his Brooklyn mosque, the elder Wahhaj said he had no knowledge of any such training.

"It sounds to me it sounds crazy. But I don't know," he said. "I make no judgments yet because we don't know."

The elder Wahhaj said all 11 of the children, ages 1 to 15, were either his biological grandchildren or members of his family through marriage.

The imam said he didn't know anything about his son wanting to perform an exorcism on the boy. But he said his son and one of his daughters had become "overly concerned" with the idea of people becoming possessed.

New Mexico's Office of the Medical Investigator said it was still working to identify the remains.