

## Fraternity Hazing Leads to NY Student's Death

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- Group initiation activities, called "hazing" are common across college campuses
- Hazing can lead to dangerous activities, including binge drinking
- A 19 year-old college sophomore recently died after his fraternity's hazing activities

Hazing is a common incident across college campuses. It often times goes uncovered and ignored until a tragedy occurs. [High school hazing](#) has also been getting a lot of press as well.

On March 1, college sophomore Arman Partamian, 19 was found dead after binge drinking episode, a part of [hazing](#) at a fraternity at State University of New York in Geneseo. It was reported that he was drinking all day, and his blood alcohol level was seven times the legal limit. Fraternity members admitted they gave him so much beer, champagne and vodka during a three-day hazing that he died of alcohol poisoning.

### What Is Hazing?

Hazing is a common on college campuses. It's a variety of rituals and other activities involving harassment, abuse and humiliation used as a way of initiating someone into a group. In many states, hazing is prohibited by law, but, it's a regular part of initiation to gangs, sport teams, military units and most commonly, college fraternities and sororities.

In many college sororities and fraternities, a part of pledging (a term for initiating candidates) includes a concentrated hazing period, called "hell week." These activities are used to promote group loyalty and friendship by giving the initiates an experience of a shared suffering.

### If Hazing Is Illegal, Why Is It So Common?

Hazing is a controversial topic. Most hazing activities within college fraternities and sororities are secretive in nature. In addition, there is a long-term acceptance of it.

Abuse has included "beating or kicking to the point of traumatic injury or death, burning or branding, excessive calisthenics, being forced to eat unpleasant substances, and psychological or sexual abuse of both males and females."<sup>1</sup> The web site [hazing.hanknuwer.com](#) keeps record deaths among college students resulting from hazing, initiation and pledging-related accidents.

### The Criminal Charges

Following Arman's death, two students were prosecuted and punished: Alex Stucki, 21, was later expelled, and Devin McClain, 22. Devin pleaded guilty to criminally negligent homicide, a felony. Stucki also [pleaded guilty](#) to misdemeanor tampering with evidence by removing a pledge t-shirt from Arman after discovering his body in a bedroom at the fraternity house.

If the case had gone to trial, their sentence could have been four years in prison; however, the two pleaded guilty. As part of the deal, the two received four months of weekends in jail and 500 hours of community service. Livingston County prosecutor Thomas Moran agreed to the deal because the defendants' showed remorse and Arman's parents wanted to be spared the anguish of a trial. Also as part of the plea deal, the misdemeanor hazing charges were dropped.

"The four months of weekends, is it light? It probably is," Moran said. "But take everything into the totality of the circumstances - the parents' wishes, the fact both defendants are branded for a lifetime (as felons) - mitigates what I think might be perceived as a little light on the jail time."<sup>2</sup>

The fraternity, also called the "Pigs," was removed from campus in 1996 after two students were hospitalized after binge drinking. It has since been dissolved.

### The Civil Lawsuit

Separate from the criminal charges, Arman's father Hagop Partamian, is suing a group of college students and the two co-owners of the fraternity property. He accuses them of giving his son so much alcohol during hazing that it caused his death. Mr. Partamian is suing them based on a wrongful death claim and is seeking \$2.5 million in compensation.

### Other Instances of Hazing

This isn't the first hazing death at colleges. In 2005, Matthew Carrington was killed at California's Chico State University. After his death, a number of colleges and parents, as well as sorority and fraternity members took steps to stop hazing practices. Colleges and fraternities can face civil lawsuits in the past for actions brought due to injuries and deaths caused by fraternity hazing.

Hazing is considered a felony in several states. Matt's Law was developed in Carrington's memory to eliminate hazing in California. In many states hazing is not a crime, and even in states where it is a crime, it's a common activity that organizations continue to use and turn a blind eye from.

Remember: Any activity or organization is not worth your health. While group initiation is common, if you suspect your organization is using improper hazing techniques, contact your school authorities right away. If you're considering joining a group, ask what their hazing policy is

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Sources

<sup>1</sup>Dahn Batchelor, The Hazing of Students Should Be Outlawed, Dahn Batchelor's Opinions, Sept. 17, 2009, available at <http://dahnbachelorsopinions.blogspot.com/2009/09/hazing-of-students-should-be-outlawed.html>, accessed Nov. 16, 2009.

<sup>2</sup>Press, Ex-Frat Members Plead Guilty in NY Hazing Death, NY Post, Oct. 27, 2009, available at [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/queens/ex\\_frat\\_members\\_plead\\_guilty\\_in\\_mrjO6hKx0FAI6ehLgrRYWP](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/queens/ex_frat_members_plead_guilty_in_mrjO6hKx0FAI6ehLgrRYWP), visited Nov. 16, 2009.

## Questions for Your Attorney

- I'm concerned about rush and hazing at my child's college. What liability does the school have for these social groups and their activities?
- What is the nature of the relationship between a local fraternity or sorority and its national organization? Is the organization liable for the acts taken by members in local chapters?
- What kinds of insurance should a fraternity or sorority carry, and how do I find such information without embarrassing my student?

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