



Posted on: Thursday, July 12, 2007

Family gets \$2M in Maui drowning

By [Rick Daysog](#)
Advertiser Staff Writer

The family of a California man who drowned near Maui's Pools of 'Ohe'o will receive \$2 million under a settlement with the federal government.

Kevin Oakley, 41, of Sun Valley, died on Aug. 18, 2003, after he was swept away by a fast-moving current while trying to rescue his 7-year-old son.

Oakley's death was the fourth in less than two years at the popular East Maui tourist destination.

Wayne Kekina, attorney for Oakley's family, said the National Park Service should have closed the pools that day because of the dangerous water levels.

Kekina added that Oakley's death could have been avoided had parks officials installed life buoys and other safety equipment. Such safety features have been added by the park service under the settlement, Kekina said.

"It's now a safer place for visitors to go," said Kekina, who sued the federal government on behalf of Oakley's family in December 2005.

Situated at the southeastern end of Haleakala National Park, the Pools of 'Ohe'o, commonly known as the Seven Sacred Pools, is visited by as many as 100,000 people a month.

It includes the gulch and stream that flows through an estimated 22 pools in the area.

During heavy rains or flash floods, the pools' currents are strong enough to sweep away unsuspecting visitors into the ocean.

Oakley, his wife Michelle, 37, and their children, Brielle, 11, and Austin, 7, were swimming in the lowest pool about 6 p.m. when Austin lost a slipper and went after it, the park service said in 2003.

His father caught up with the boy and was holding his arm before both were swept into a narrow, rocky section of the stream and into the ocean.

Dean Miller, an emergency medical technician from Placentia, Calif., jumped into the ocean and grabbed the boy but was unable to reach Kevin Oakley, who was carried farther out to sea. A Maui County Fire Department helicopter recovered his body floating 400 yards north of the pools at 7 p.m.

Oakley's death came 15 months after a New York resident, Xina Wang, was washed out to sea by a strong current at the same pool.

Wang's husband, Timothy Wendt, sued the National Park Service and was awarded \$2.3 million by a federal judge. The case eventually was settled after the government appealed.



Kevin Oakley, 41, of Sun Valley, Calif., drowned Aug. 18, 2003, at Maui's Pools of 'Ohe'o, also known as the Seven Sacred Pools.

Wayne Kekina

RELATED NEWS FROM THE WEB

Latest headlines by topic:

- [US National Parks](#)
- [Weather](#)

Powered by [Topix.net](#)

A month before Wang's death, a Louisville, Ky., man and his 8-year-old daughter were swept over Makahiku Falls, farther upstream, and out to sea. The two were never found.

Reach Rick Daysog at rdaysog@honoluluadvertiser.com.

[Back](#)

© COPYRIGHT 2007 The Honolulu Advertiser, a division of [Gannett Co.](#) Inc.

All materials contained on this site are protected by United States copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast without the prior written permission of The Honolulu Advertiser. You may not alter or remove any trademark, copyright or other notice from copies of the content.