

First Use of 'Suicide Capsule' in Switzerland Prompts Several Arrests

Police in northern Switzerland have detained several people and opened a criminal case in connection with the suspected death of a woman who died by the unauthorized use of a "suicide capsule."

Exit International, an assisted suicide group based in the Netherlands, says it is behind the "Sarco" capsule.

The 3D-printed device is presumably designed to allow a person sitting in a reclining seat inside to push a button that injects nitrogen gas into the sealed chamber. The person is then supposed to fall asleep and die of suffocation.

According to Swiss Catholic News, the \$1 million machine does not meet the country's product safety requirements. Public prosecutors' offices in several Swiss territories said they would initiate criminal proceedings if the capsule were used.

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"It does not fulfill the demands of the product safety law, and as such, must not be brought into circulation," said Health Minister Elisabeth Baume-Schneider. "On the other hand, the corresponding use of nitrogen is not compatible with the article on purpose in the chemicals law.

"It must not be placed on the market," she added.

An "assisted suicide" involving the Sarco took place Monday near a forest in Merishausen, Swiss police said in a statement.

Prosecutors have opened an investigation on suspicion of incitement and accessory to suicide. A conviction could trigger a sentence of up to five years in prison.

Police in northern Switzerland confirmed that “several people” were taken into custody and Volkskrant, a Dutch Newspaper, reported Tuesday that police detained one of its photographers who wanted to take pictures of the Sarco in use.

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It said Schaffhausen police had indicated the photographer was being held at a police station but declined to explain further.

In an email, the Dutch Foreign Ministry told the Associated Press that it was in contact with the newspaper and Swiss officials. “As always, we cannot interfere in the legal process of another country. At the same time, the Netherlands stands firmly for press freedom,” it said.

Exit International shared in a statement that the person who died was a 64-year-old woman from the U.S. Midwest, who had suffered from “severe immune compromise.” The group provided no further details.

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