

Missing Scientist Mystery Grows as New Evidence Raises Foul Play Questions

What happened to Melissa Casias?

More than a year after the Los Alamos National Laboratory employee seemingly vanished without a trace, that question has only become more disturbing. Her remains have been found. An autopsy has revealed she suffered a gunshot wound. And now, authorities have confirmed another chilling detail: The handgun discovered near her body had been purchased by her husband.

Casias, 53, disappeared June 26, 2025, after dropping her husband, Mark Casias, off at Los Alamos National Laboratory, where both worked in non-scientific positions.

She reportedly returned home after forgetting her security badge, later delivered lunch to her daughter and was last seen walking alone along State Road 518 at approximately 2:20 p.m.

Then, she was gone.

Nearly 11 months later, on May 28, Casias' skeletal remains were discovered in a remote area of Carson National Forest, roughly six miles from her Taos home.

Now, the investigation has taken another unsettling turn.

New Mexico State Police confirmed to the Daily Mail that her husband had purchased a handgun found near Casias' remains. The outlet identified it as a black Springfield handgun purchased in 2020.

Authorities have not named Mark Casias as a suspect or accused him of involvement in his wife's death. Police also have not

publicly disclosed whether the weapon was fired or whether forensic testing has connected it to the gunshot wound.

But that wound is now at the center of the mystery.

A newly released autopsy revealed that Casias suffered a gunshot wound to the head around the time of her death. Because her remains were severely decomposed, medical investigators could not determine whether she died by suicide or homicide. Her manner of death remains officially undetermined.

The suspected trajectory of the bullet, however, is generating even more questions.

According to the Daily Mail, investigators believe the bullet traveled through the right side of the base of Casias' skull, damaged the C1 vertebra at the top of her neck and exited through the left side of her skull. The bullet was never recovered.



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An anonymous law enforcement source questioned whether the trajectory was consistent with a self-inflicted wound and alleged that the evidence instead pointed toward murder. Authorities have made no such official determination.

Casias' family is also publicly rejecting the possibility that she took her own life.

"We want to make something very clear: The Mondragon family AND Melissa's closest friends do not believe Melissa took her own life!" relatives wrote in an Aug. 7 Facebook statement.

Even more troubling, attorney David Adams, who represents the family, told the Daily Mail that relatives and volunteers

returned to the location after authorities had cleared the scene and discovered potential evidence, including bloody bones and clothing, hair that appeared to belong to another person and tobacco. Adams said Casias was not known to use tobacco.

Casias' daughter, Sierra, however, is urging caution.

"The ruling of 'undetermined' does not mean that anyone has been found responsible for my mother's death," she said in a statement reported by KOAT.

Sierra revealed that her mother's backpack was found near her remains with a gun holster inside. A bottle of alcohol and pieces of paper, investigators said, could potentially be notes, were also discovered nearby.

Then there are the phones.

Both of Casias' phones were reportedly left behind at her home. They had been completely wiped of information on the very day she disappeared.

Casias' employment at one of America's most sensitive nuclear research facilities has added yet another layer of intrigue. It makes the questions impossible to ignore.

A nuclear laboratory employee disappears. Her phones are left behind, wiped clean. Nearly a year later, her remains are found with evidence of a gunshot wound. A handgun purchased by her husband is discovered nearby. And her family says they do not believe she took her own life.

The mystery surrounding Melissa Casias is no longer simply about where she went.

It is about what happened to her, and whether the evidence still waiting to be uncovered will finally reveal the truth.

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