



Morning fog,
then clearing

High: 84
Low: 60

Details in
COFFEE BREAK

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Mental patient's confession in slaying ignored

By David Ferris
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FREMONT — David Maxwell Panick called 911 to report he had killed his roommate, but no one came.

He told a Fremont police dispatcher at 6:16 a.m. Friday that he had killed someone. Then he told a nurse. But it wasn't until three hours later that the staff at Westwood mental health facility went to Room 200 and learned what happened, police reports say.

There they found John Norton's body bludgeoned, bloody and wrapped in blankets on the floor.

Officials at Westwood, a locked facility on Stevenson Boulevard that houses about 90 county mental-health patients, said patients make many bizarre emergency calls from their pay phone.

"We have patients constantly calling (911) and threatening the president, saying they've been raped," Westwood Administrator Jody Cafferata said. "It's a private phone for the patients and

we're not allowed to listen in."

That morning, the confessed killer lay sprawled on his own bed. On the floor, one of his brown loafers was bloodied. Panick's calendar, pinned to the wall between his bed and Norton's, bore the scrawl "God dam me to hell"(sic).

Later, after the police had strung police tape around the bedroom, Detective Frank Noey's tape recorder picked up Panick muttering:

"The man I killed, I panicked; nobody would listen to my story."

Details are scanty on the life of David Panick. The 55-year-old, a native of Santa Cruz, spent the last three years rooming with a Westwood patient named Douglas Root.

Panick spent years in Westwood and a mental facility in Santa Clara County, which acts as his conservator. His public defender and conservator Wednesday refused to comment on his case.

The Alameda County district attorney

Please see **Killing**, A-11

Killing: Patient's murder confession is ignored, at first

Continued from A-1

ney's office will prosecute Panick on one charge of murder.

"Are you David Maxwell Panick?" Judge Donald Squires asked the suspect Wednesday in Fremont Municipal Court.

"Dave . . . Max," replied Panick, who is being held without bail at North County Jail. His hands twitched in their handcuffs and he rocked back and forth on his heels.

Aside from Panick's confession, investigators have as evidence a spot of blood on Panick's pillow and his bloody loafer.

The night before the murder, Norton moved from another room into the three-bed room Panick and Root had had to themselves for several weeks.

That night, Panick acted stranger than usual, the report said. He was known to talk often of other planets, and some days he would stare at one person all day.

But this night he wandered about, and when nurses escorted him back to his room, he emerged to wander again. He swore at staffers and mumbled to himself: He wanted to catch a plane in San Jose and leave the country. He talked of cults and the devil.

Root slept the whole night and seemed to know nothing of the killing, the report said.

At 6:16, Panick called 911 from a pay phone around the corner from his room. He told Fremont police dispatcher Cheryl Lesage that he had killed someone, that the cult made him do it.

He wouldn't say who he killed, and then he rambled into other matters, such as his suspicion that the food at Westwood had been laced with street drugs.

With Panick on hold, Lesage called Westwood's shift supervisor, Jim Argenbright.

"She advised him what Panick had been speaking of," the report said. "Argenbright stated there was no problem."

About 7 a.m., Panick again told his story, this time to a nurse, but the story went unchecked. About 9 a.m. staffers Kathy Dewey, Colleen Guterrez and Bill Kendall walked into the room on routine rounds. The curtain around Norton's bed was drawn.

Panick lay on his bed, his arms and legs stretched out as if he already were in four-point restraints. He asked them if he could be restrained. Why do you want to be restrained? one of them asked. "Look in the next bed," he reportedly told them.