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**MOTHER SENTENCED TO PRISON IN DROWNING DEATH OF
TWO-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER**

A 25-year old Merced woman was sentenced Thursday to four years in prison in connection with the drowning death of her two-year old daughter. Rachel Ladonna Harris pled no contest in Merced County Superior Court to one count of involuntary manslaughter arising out of an incident in May in which Harris' daughter, Gracy Harris, fell into the family pool. At the time of the drowning Harris was sleeping off the effects of being under the influence of methamphetamine and marijuana, according to Merced County Deputy District Attorney Monika Saini, who prosecuted the case.

The day before the drowning, Harris had given birth to another child. Hospital officials determined that Harris was under the influence of drugs at the time of the baby's birth. The newborn baby girl also was found to have drugs in her system. The newborn was taken by Merced County Child Protective Services before Harris checked herself out of Mercy Hospital against the advice of medical personnel, according to Saini.

When she returned home Harris, who was the sole caretaker of two-year old Gracy, took a nap. As she was sleeping, Gracy went through a sliding glass door and a screen door, both with no locking mechanisms and fell into the pool. Saini said Harris had previously been warned not to fill the pool since she had a small child and there was no gate around the pool. It was unclear how long Gracy was in the pool before Harris discovered her body, Saini added.

"This incident serves as a grim reminder of how vulnerable children are, and the tragedies that can take place when proper care is not provided for them," Saini said. "The death of this child was a completely avoidable tragedy that was the result of both a drug addiction and the failure to take basic safeguards to protect her," Saini noted.

On the day that Gracy drowned, Harris was determined to have methamphetamine, marijuana and barbiturates in her system. Under the terms of Harris's plea, she will serve 30 months in custody followed by 18 months of supervision, Saini said.

Saini said the thorough investigation conducted by Detective Joe Deliman and the Merced Police Department was instrumental in obtaining the plea. "Nothing can bring two-year old Gracy back to those who loved her. Ms. Harris will have to live with this for the rest of her life. Hopefully, others who are enslaved by their addictions will see this as a cautionary tale," Saini said.