METROSSTATE

LOOK OUT, AUSTIN

These 5 natural threats can hurt you or even kill you

Roberto Villalpando

Austin American-Statesman | USA TODAY NETWORK

Every winter in Austin unleashes cedar fever's allergy wrath on our throats and sinuses, producing the worst misery this side of COVID-19. But if that's the worst thing Mother Nature throws at you this year, consider yourself lucky.

Now's a good time to get acquainted with some of our nastier hazards. If you live in Central Texas, here are five natural threats — in no particular order — that can hurt you, or even kill you:

1. Severe weather, including floods and tornadoes

Bob Rose, meteorologist for the Lower Colorado River Authority — the agency that manages the Highland Lakes on the Colorado River for hydroelectricity and flood control — told the American-Statesman last month that "because of the terrain of Central Texas, we own the title of being one of the most flash flood-prone areas in the entire U.S."

See THREATS, Page 2B



Michelle Light salvages belongings from her home at FM 2843 and Cedar Valley Road near Salado a day after a tornado destroyed the house last April.

JAY JANNER/AMERICAN-STATESMAN



Police investigate at Rajan Moonesinghe's South Austin home Nov. 15 after he was fatally shot in front of his house by a police officer. JAY JANNER/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

RAJAN MOONESINGHE WAS DYING

WHY WAS HE IN HANDCUFFS?





ATX in Context
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■ Rajan Moonesinghe is shown with his mother, Ruth. A businessman and foodie of Sri Lankan descent, Moonesinghe was working on opening a modern steakhouse in Austin before he was killed. PROVIDED BY FAMILY A minute after firing five shots at Rajan Moonesinghe outside his South Austin home, police officer Daniel Sanchez pulled the bleeding man into handcuffs. It wasn't easy.

The 33-year-old tech entrepreneur was curled up on his front porch, gunshot wounds in his chest, back, abdomen and thighs. His left arm was fractured near the wrist

"Roll over on your stomach, buddy, so we can help you," Sanchez said right after the Nov. 15 shooting, as Moonesinghe lay there, motionless.

"He's having trouble," officer Stephen Markert observed.

That's about where the officers' body camera footage cuts out, at least the portion of the video that the Austin Police

See GRUMET, Page 8B

Texas failing at smoking prevention, report says

Laws, funding for prevention are two ways the state could improve

Nicole Villalpando

Austin American-Statesman | USA TODAY NETWORK

Texas is one of the worst states in the country when it comes to cigarette smoking, according to the American Lung Association.

In its new "State of Tobacco Control Report," the advocacy group gives Texas — along with Alabama, Mississippi and North Carolina — failing grades on every category the report tracks.

Those are:

- Funding for tobacco prevention programs
- Strength of smoke-free workplace laws
- Level of state tobacco taxes
- Coverage and access to services to quit tobaccoEnding the sale of all flavored tobacco products

Texas "refuses to do most of what's recommended" by the group, said Charlie Gagen, the American Lung Association director of advocacy for Texas and

Currently in Texas, 13% of adults smoke (slightly above national rates), 4.9% of high school students smoke (more than twice the national rate), and 18.7% of high-schoolers use e-cigarettes (4 percentage

See SMOKING, Page 3B



Currently in Texas, 13% of adults smoke, 4.9% of high school students smoke, and 18.7% of high school students use e-cigarettes, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

BRIANA SANCHEZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

University of Texas partners with H-E-B for on-campus delivery service

Megan Menchaca

Austin American-Statesman | USA TODAY NETWORK

The University of Texas is partnering with H-E-B to offer on-campus grocery delivery for students, faculty and staff members, the school announced Tuesday.

UT community members can order food and all other available products, from produce to school supplies, from H-E-B through the grocery store's app or website, the school said in a news release. People can then select a delivery time and location, and delivery drivers from Favor, a food ordering platform, will deliver the items.

"Being able to offer this service is a great resource for students who don't have time to shop or who don't have transportation beyond campus, helping them easily access the groceries and supplies they need," said Soncia Reagins-Lilly, UT's vice president for student affairs and dean of students.

The Favor runners can use one of four designated parking spots on campus: at Jester Circle, Jester Residence Hall, Kinsolving Residence Hall and Bass Concert Hall. Door-to-door delivery is also available to all students, including those living off campus, according



The University of Texas is partnering with H-E-B to offer on-campus grocery delivery for students, faculty and staff members. PROVIDED BY H-E-B

"This initiative also considers those who live off campus, which is a group we found that is not often represented in policies regarding food insecurity at UT. We are excited for this initiative to be implemented and believe that this is a step in the right direction" to address food insecurity.

Ria Bhasin

UT senior and co-chair of the Food Insecurity Action Team

to the release.

"For more than a century, H-E-B and UT Austin have shared a mission to strengthen Texas through excellence in education, commitment to diversity and efforts to make our communities resilient," said Kelsey Evans, UT's executive director for corporate relations. "As we look to the future and the changing face of commerce, we are proud to become one of H-E-B's newest Campus Delivery Hubs, a step that will ensure all Longhorns have access to affordable nutrition."

See DELIVERY, Page 2B

Grumet

Department publicly posted two months ago.

It's part of the evidence in the ongoing investigation into Moonesinghe's death, a tragedy rooted in a chain of critical events: Moonesinghe decided to confront an intruder instead of calling 911. He fired his rifle into his own house. A police dispatcher didn't tell officers that the armed man was the person who lived there. And, crucially, Sanchez opened fire before Moonesinghe had a chance to drop his weapon or explain

Change any of those moments and this man could still be alive.

Now, Moonesinghe's family is raising new questions about the use of force in this case. Additional footage from Moonesinghe's front porch security camera, which his family provided to the American-Statesman, shows that police kept the dying man in handcuffs for an ago-



Johann Moonesinghe talks about the Nov. 15 incident in which an Austin police officer shot and killed his brother, Rajan Moonesinghe. "It made me really, really, really angry when I saw that footage" showing his wounded brother, he says. RICARDO B. BRAZZIELL/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

nizing six minutes.

Even when it was clear he posed no threat and needed medical attention.

At one point, the security camera footage shows, a female officer providing basic medical care says: "You have to uncuff him. You can't do CPR with him

But Moonesinghe remained handcuffed for an additional two minutes until medics arrived. Then a male officer said, "Take him out of cuffs, take him out of cuffs.'

Moonesinghe died a short time later at the hospital.

Citing the open investigation, the Police Department has declined to answer any questions about the Nov. 15 shooting, including my questions about the officers' decision to handcuff Moones-

"The department respects the investigation and court process and will not make any further comments at this

Continued on next page

Obituaries

Bettye Jo Stokes

AUSTIN - Bettye Jo Stokes (Partridge) passed away peacefully in her home of over 50 years in Austin on January 24, 2023. Bettye was born on October 08, 1932 in Point, Texas. Bettye grew up in a large family, the 12th and final child of James and Lottie Partridge. Bettye graduated as Salutatorian from Lone Oak High School in 1949. Bettye married her high school sweetheart, Johnnie Ray 'John R.' Stokes, on February 23, 1950. Bettye and John R. were full partners in life and business and she was a key contributor and behind-the-scenes driver of many of the family businesses created during their



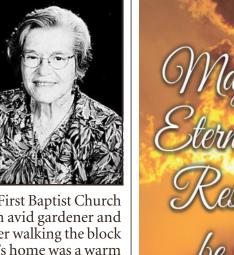
six decades of marriage. Bettye was an active member of First Baptist Church of Austin since moving to Austin in 1971. Bettye was an avid gardener and loved canning vegetables. Neighbors could always find her walking the block and her pool was always open to their neighbors. Bettye's home was a warm and beloved refuge to her many friends and family from all over the world.

Bettye was preceded in death by her husband John R., her parents, James Franklin Partridge and Lottie Elizabeth Partridge (Goff), her siblings, Nellie, Roxie Ann, Ruby, Shorty Bill, Twin Girl Partridge, Johnnie Leon, Tom, Ada, Louise, Beulah, Sonny, and her son, Bill.

Bettye was blessed with an abundant family — four sons, 12 grandchildren, 29 great grandchildren, and one great grandchild. She is survived by three sons - John T. (Janet), Michael (Brenda), and Erich (Susan); as well as her grandchildren Valerie Longoria (Joe) and their children Amanda (David), Steven, and David; Jonathan (Sofia) and their children Y'shua (Sofia), Sarah Mesick (Mathias) and their daughter (Riah), Andrew (Brooke), Paul (Hannah), Bennett, Hart, Cora, Olivia, and Jon; Corrie (Kerry Sheehan) and their children Hazel and Wilke; William and his children Porter and Vivienne; Joanna (Ross Cleveland) and their children Peyton and Riley; James (Taylor) and their children Myla, Kinsley and Cohen; Jocelyn Thompson (David) and their children Kobe and Elise; Jaynellen Stokes-Walters (Ron); Scott Jones (Amber) and their children Christian, Kaley, and Canaan; Rachelle Anselmi and her son Connor (Charlotte Young); Matt Jones (Aja) and their sons Caleb and Colin; and Brian.

Bettye is also survived by her daughter-in-law Cookie Stokes, her sister-inlaw Jean Bilson, her brother-in-law Robert Stokes, and numerous extended family. Bettye was well known for her hospitality and her warm nature, and her memory will continue to be a blessing to all who knew her. Following in her husband's footsteps, Bettye wished for her body to be donated to the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, February 4, 2023 at 2:00 pm at First Baptist Church of Austin, 901 Trinity Street, Austin, TX 78701. Donations can be made to First Baptist Church of Austin, or a charity of your choice. Floral contributions can be sent directly to First Baptist Church of Austin.

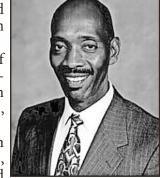




ROUND ROCK - Robert Freeman, 72, passed away January 23, 2023 in Round Rock, TX.

The only child of Othelia and May Freeman-Perry, was born in Gilmer, TX on April 12, 1949.

He graduated from Klein High School Spring, TX, in 1967 and



from The US Military Academy at West Point in 1971 with a commission in the US Army as a Second Lieutenant. He retired with twenty years of service as a Lieutenant Colonel. While in the army, he completed the requirements for master degrees in Business Administration and Personnel Management.

After retirement, he moved to Round Rock,

He is survived by his mother, May Perry of Round Rock, TX, four uncles, one aunt, and many relatives and friends.

Funeral services will be held on Friday, February 3 at 11:00 am at Sweet Home -Pinnacle of Praise, 3200 Sunrise Rd, Round Rock, TX 78665. Memorial and Interment, Monday, February 6, 2023 at 11am Paradise Funeral Home and 12 noon, Paradise North Cemetery, 10401 West Montgomery Rd, Houston, TX 77088.

Many thanks to the doctors and nurses of Ascension Seton Round Rock, the staff at Texas Oncology, his Spiritual Family of Sweet Home and neighbors.

Elnora Noack

AUSTIN - Ellie Noack (Elnora Jeannette Noack), born October 5, 1930, passed away Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at Hospice Austin's Christopher House after recently celebrating her 92nd birthday.

Ellie was born and raised in Port Arthur, Texas from UT, she began her teaching experience in ele-

where she first found her true calling in athletics and education. After graduating high school, she attended the University of Texas to work on her degrees, and it was here that she developed her lifelong love affair with Austin. After receiving her B.S. in Physical Education and Master's Education

mentary schools through high schools across Texas. It goes without saying that it was inevitable she would return to Austin.

Going on to serve the AISD, Ellie was ultimately named Athletic Director for the district, making her the first woman in Texas to attain that position. In 2001, she was inducted into the Texas Athletic Directors Association's Hall of Honor. Ellie was further honored when, in 2003, AISD named its newest sports facility after her. Moreover, the Kinesiology and Health Education department at UT later inducted her into its Hall of Fame in 2016.

After a remarkable career of 36 years, Ellie retired in 1989 but refused to "take it easy". She embarked on numerous trips with her brother Don and sister-in-law Shirley, visiting Mexico and the majority of Europe, with Germany and Austria as particular favorites.

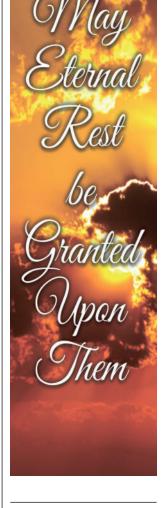
Ellie was an ardent supporter of the University of Texas, particularly her beloved Lady Longhorns basketball team. She often brought friends and family along to experience the excitement of these games, and proudly stated that she had season tickets to the Lady 'Horns since season tickets existed.

As enthusiastic as Ellie felt about UT, she was--perhaps impossibly--even more passionate about her "career" as an aunt and great aunt, spoiling Mark, Scott, Debbie, Stephanie, Paige, Haley and Jake alike. They remain in awe of her inspiration, her wit, and most of all, her love.

Ellie is survived by brother Don, best friend Janice, and her cherished nieces and nephews.

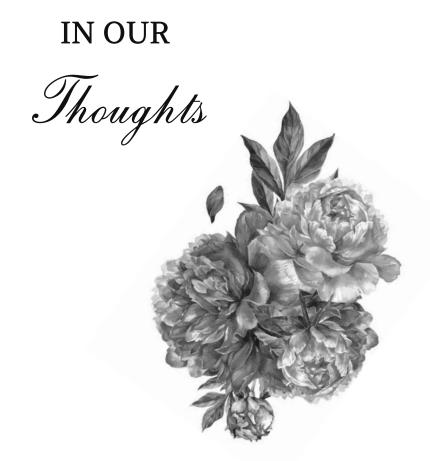
Services will be held at her church of 50 years, University United Methodist Church on Monday, February 6 at 1:00pm. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to Hospice Austin (www.hospiceaustin.org) or the Austin Humane Society (www.austinhumanesociety.org).

Hook 'em Horns, Ellie. The eyes, and heart, of Texas will always be upon









Continued from previous page

time," police spokesman Brandon Jones

The Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas, or CLEAT, which represents Sanchez, also declined to comment. Sanchez just marked his third year on the force, with one positive performance review and no complaints in his public file. He remains on paid leave while the investigation plays out.

Moonesinghe's older brother, Johann, obtained the front porch security camera footage from Ring. He has pored over all the video from that night, frame by frame, anguished and looking for an-

"He clearly wasn't responsive at all, so why handcuff him?" Johann Moonesinghe asked. "And at that moment, (police) would have known that he was the homeowner and that they had shot the homeowner. Then why didn't they try to save him?"

"It's not human to me at all," he added. "It made me really, really, really angry when I saw that footage.'

Gifted and generous

Those who knew Rajan Moonesinghe - Raj - never expected his story to turn out this way. It's hard to square the final images of him, armed on his own doorstep, with the generous person family and friends knew.

Moonesinghe was a California native and finance whiz who worked his way through the University of San Diego by trading stock options, his brother told me. The brothers and two other partners co-founded inKind, an app that has provided upfront capital for more than 650 restaurants by selling food and beverage credits to more than 200,000 customers.

A foodie of Sri Lankan descent, Moonesinghe was developing his own restaurant called Ember, a modern steakhouse steeped in Latin flavors, slated to open soon in the Seaholm district. He brought over soup when friends were sick and dropped off burgers when his brother returned from business trips.

"I think hospitality was in his DNA," said Johann Moonesinghe, recalling how his brother loved to grill meat and vegetables at their dinner parties. At the office, Rajan Moonesinghe made sure everyone felt welcome.

His family said Moonesinghe also wanted to develop a sustainable farm-

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The investigation continues into the deadly police shooting of Rajan Moonesinghe, a 33-year-old tech entrepreneur, PROVIDED BY FAMILY

More online

Visit statesman.com to view the new video footage from before and after the Nov. 15 shooting of Rajan Moonesinghe.

ing operation, alongside a school and medical clinic, on more than 200 acres he bought in Zambia, building on a passion for charitable work in Africa that began when he was in high school.

The brothers moved to Austin five years ago, figuring the tech hub would be a great place to grow inKind. They eventually settled two blocks from each other in the Bouldin Creek area, on streets where modern, two-story homes have been replacing midcentury bungalows at breathtaking speed.

Growing concerns over safety

Those million-dollar homes boast a coveted location near downtown. But the neighborhood has seen its share of break-ins and other crimes.

A woman who used to live across the street from Rajan Moonesinghe was held up at gunpoint in November 2020, as she returned home one night. Police took a report but never found the assail-

"I was traumatized by that," said the woman, who asked not to be identified because she is the victim of an unsolved crime. "I kept telling (family members) to make sure the doors are locked."

In the spring of 2021, Johann Moonesinghe's husband, inKind co-founder Andy Harris, discovered a rusted machete on top of their garbage can, shortly after neighbors posted on NextDoor about an agitated man walking around with such a weapon. Harris called police, who took the machete away.

And just over a year ago, another friend and inKind co-worker, El Khattary, was washing dishes after dinner when he saw a man scale his fence and roam through his backyard. His home is seven doors down from where Rajan Moonesinghe lived on South Third Street, just north of Oltorf Street.

"It kind of freaked us out," Khattary told me. He thought about going out there with a knife, but his wife urged restraint. Yelling at the intruder was enough to chase him off.

"We were concerned this individual would come back at night," Khattary said. "So obviously we had our alarm system on and our cameras going."

His brother said Rajan Moonesinghe knew about those incidents and had his own concerns, as the duplex where he lived backed up to a wooded area frequented by people who are homeless.

In August 2021, Rajan Moonesinghe swapped out his doorbell camera for a porch security camera.

Last October, he bought a Daniel Defense DDM4 semi-automatic rifle with a 16-inch barrel. A friend helped him practice using the weapon at a gun range.

Shortly after midnight Nov. 15, Moonesinghe paced around his porch with that rifle. Security camera footage shows him telling a neighbor that there is an intruder in the house, outside the camera's view. In other moments, Moonesinghe issues orders to leave.

"Get out of my house," he said at one point, growing exasperated. "Otherwise

I'm going to shoot the (expletive) out of you, and I don't want to."

The 911 call came from a security guard hired by the neighbor across the street, where a sleek new home sits behind security gates.

A spate of unanswered questions

Even with the security camera footage, there are so many questions about that night.

For starters: Why didn't Rajan Moonesinghe call police?

His brother suggested that maybe Moonesinghe couldn't reach his phones because of where the intruder was standing. Also, the brother noted, "I don't know that minorities are comfortable calling the police for reasons that Rajan's death makes obvious."

As Moonesinghe stood armed outside that night, his neighbor asked if he had called police.

"I did not," he said, holding up his rifle, "because I have a nice big (expletive)

A few seconds later, he adds, "I need to call the police."

Did something impair Moonesinghe's judgment? His brother said he had no history of mental health problems. We're still waiting for an autopsy report that will indicate whether he had been drinking. But the 911 caller said Moonesinghe appeared too coordinated to be intoxicated. When Johann Moonesinghe looks at his brother's demeanor on the video footage, "I think he's really scared."

What about the intruder? Police found no one inside when they got there. It's unclear whether someone could have slipped out the back door. Moonesinghe believed someone had broken into his house before: When he returned from a trip the previous day, he told his mother, his bedspread was missing and other items had been moved around.

Other central questions revolve around the police response.

The 911 caller told dispatchers that the man with the gun was at his own house and that he might be having a mental health issue. "He almost seems to be scared of something inside of his home," the caller told dispatchers.

Yet that information was not relayed to officers headed to the scene. According to a recording of police radio traffic,

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officers were only told there was a man who pointed a rifle toward the street. The dispatcher started to provide another detail — that the armed man was turning the house lights on and off — when an officer cut in to announce shots had been fired.

Indeed, Sanchez immediately opened fire as he finished shouting, "Drop the gun!" Why didn't he give Moonesinghe a chance to comply? Officers have been trained in de-escalation techniques, and the video shows Moonesinghe never raised his gun toward police.

And, once Moonesinghe was critically wounded by multiple gunshots, why was he handcuffed?

As he struggled to remain conscious, with officers repeatedly telling him to "stay with us," why did he remain in handcuffs?

A source of soul-searching

It's Austin police policy to handcuff a person being taken into custody, even when that person is injured. Several experts told me that's standard practice. The suspect could turn combative or try to escape.

Still, officers are supposed to use discretion. The Police Department's General Orders say that "the officer will consider the prisoner's special circumstances before applying any restraining device."

The policy adds: "The prisoner should not be restrained in such a way that proper medical attention is prevented."

Jesse Porter, a retired lieutenant from the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department who now serves as an instructor and consultant, said officers are trained to secure the scene by handcuffing suspects. Once they have a better read of the situation, though, they should reassess whether restraints are needed.

"The subject in this situation was severely injured (and) probably didn't require handcuffing," Porter told me.

He also noted that an officer's adrenaline is pumping after a shooting. It's incumbent on the supervisor arriving on scene to look at the situation with fresh eyes.

In trainings conducted with other police departments, Porter tells them, "If you see (a person) doesn't require re-



A forensics worker photographs a rifle Nov. 15 at the scene in the 2300 block of South Third Street where Rajan Moonesinghe was killed by a police officer. JAY JANNER/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

straints, you tell them to take them off."

Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, noted that the Austin police policy allows for discretion. The challenge is teaching officers how to exercise it.

This is a conversation happening at police departments around the country, after other high-profile cases of people left in handcuffs as they were dead or dving.

"Some departments are revisiting the circumstances under which you would handcuff someone," Wexler told me. "There's a lot of soul-searching going on as to how you balance the threat officers may face from an individual with the sanctity of human life in getting that person treated."

It's impossible to say whether Moonesinghe would have survived without the handcuffs. His gunshot wounds were severe, according to a preliminary autopsy ordered by the family.

But the restraints needlessly added to the pain of his final moments. And they represent one more area where the grieving family wants to see change — not because anything could bring Moonesinghe back. But because no one else should suffer that same way.

Grumet is the Statesman's Metro columnist. Her column, ATX in Context, contains her opinions. Share yours via email at bgrumet@statesman.com or via Twitter at @bgrumet. Find her previous work at statesman.com/news/ columns.





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