



# NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS

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**Nisqually Flood Evacuee Hopes for the Best**  
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## Thurston County Mother Accused of Killing Infant

**BY ERIC SCHWARTZ**  
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A 42-year-old Thurston County woman remains jailed with bail set at \$750,000 after her ar-

rest Wednesday on suspicion of second-degree murder following the death of her 3-month-old daughter.

Erin Elizabeth Hammonds appeared in Thurston County Superior Court Thursday where prosecutors asked for bail to be set at \$1 million based on her criminal history, which includes 13 instances when she failed to appear for hearings.

Commissioner Rebekah Zinn presided over the hearing, finding there was probable cause to charge Hammonds and setting her bail at \$750,000.

Detectives were called to the 1800 block of Carpenter Road Southeast on Tuesday, Jan. 28, after Hammonds said she had found the girl deceased in bed.

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## Mount Rainier Area Hit With Mudslides, Flooding

By Nisqually Valley News Staff

Area rivers have shrunk back into their banks, but saturated soil, particularly in the area of Mount Rainier National Park, was continuing to lead to mudslides and washed out roads earlier this week.

The National Park Service reported last weekend that saturated soil from weeks of heavy rain led to mudslides damaging roads outside Mount Rainier National Park, including state Route 706, resulting in the closure of all roads leading into the park.

State Route 706 near the park is closed due to a landslide, according to a post on social media from the Washington State Department of Transportation.

"A WSDOT geotechnical engineer found an extremely unstable slope above SR 706," the post reads. "The continuing slide remains too dangerous to remove. Water is still actively flowing across the highway. The highway has hundreds of yards of debris that is at least several feet deep."

The park's main Nisqually entrance road has also reportedly likely sustained damage near Sunshine point, where a flood washed out the road in 2006.

Access to the Carbon River area is also blocked due to a washout, state Route 410 is blocked by four mudslides and

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## 'Everything Went to Hell'

*Nisqually Residents Count Their Losses After Flooding*



Paul Dunn / Nisqually Valley News

Kit Potts, left, and his son David use a small hose and a pushbroom Monday, Feb. 10., to try and push the mud on Kit's Nisqually Valley property to one side so they can access their shop in back and clear a safe place to walk.

**BY PAUL DUNN**  
Nisqually Valley News

Kit Potts had a choice: his sons or his tools.

Sounds like an easy one, doesn't it? But when you've accumulated thousands of dollars worth of power equipment and

other implements for your shop over the years it gives a man pause to think.

But not for long.

It was about 11:15 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 6., at Potts' home on 6th Avenue S.E. in the Nisqually Valley. Rain was falling, turning dirt to mud in the

yard around his approximately 3,000-square-foot workshop when within seconds the water that had begun to cover his feet suddenly rushed in like a "minitsunami." As far as Potts could tell, a small levee in back of his property broke and began the deluge even before the Nisqually

River — which lies about 400 feet farther from his property — broke its banks.

"Within seconds the water was up to mid-thigh," Potts, 57, recalled on Monday, Feb. 10, as he and his sons began cleaning

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## Rising River Prompted Exodus of Residents on Nisqually Delta

**BY ERIC ROSANE**  
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It was a worst-case scenario for Darlene "Kaye" Ginter, her 15 chickens and her 9-year-old pitbull mix named Lacey.

The 64-year-old Nisqually woman woke up Thursday morning, Feb. 6, to a distressing sight. The Nisqually River had flooded a good majority of her street, 6th Avenue, and was well within 500 feet from the doorstep of her rambler.

At around noon, deputies with the Thurston County Sheriff's Office began going door-to-door notifying residents of a level 3 evacuation, with the river just a stone's throw away from her house.

Ginter's daughter and brother began packing up her most prized belongings into a red Nissan pickup and her Chrysler PT Cruiser.

She didn't know where she'd

■ SEE **EXODUS**, PAGE A9



Residents of Riverside Manor Apartments stand near the Nisqually River Thursday afternoon during a major flood that evacuated hundreds of people from the area.

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# More Drug Offenders Would Be Sentenced to Treatment Instead of Prison Under Proposed Law

BY LEONA VAUGHN  
WNPA News Service

OLYMPIA — Proposals moving through the Legislature would expand the eligibility of incarcerated people to receive treatment for substance abuse in lieu of or concurrently with prison sentences.

Senate Bill 6211 was heard by the Law and Justice Committee in an executive session on Thursday, Feb. 6. Its companion, House Bill 2334, is scheduled to be considered Saturday, Feb. 8 in House Appropriations. Both bills expand the eligibility for the state's existing drug offender sentencing

alternative to people convicted of crimes, such as certain sex offenses, that make them ineligible presently.

For example, the Senate version would extend the alternative to those who, "have been convicted of a sex offense, so long as the offender is no longer required to register; and have been convicted of robbery in the 2nd degree, if the conviction did not involve the use of a firearm and the charge was not reduced from robbery in the first degree within seven years before conviction of the current offense," according to the bill report.

"We all know that access to

substance abuse disorder treatment is something we all need to work on and provide more of," said Sen. Manka Dhingra, D-Redmond, the Senate version's primary sponsor. "This bill takes a look at some of the barriers that individuals have in accessing that treatment and helps address those barriers."

The bill also broadens the eligibility of an offender to receive a residential-based sentencing, as opposed to a prison-based one.

"Current law unnecessarily shuts the door on many offenders who want that treatment, without which they would be susceptible to committing crime to support

their addiction," King County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Joel Merkel said during a Thursday, Jan. 30, public hearing on the Senate bill.

"This bill will allow more non-violent offenders who want treatment to choose treatment over incarceration," Merkel said.

Under the bill, the court will be authorized to sentence in-patient treatment lasting up to six months for the prisoner, which may include confinement in jail for up to 30 days for the purpose of facilitating a direct transfer to the treatment.

The Department of Corrections is also required to submit a

report on the effectiveness of the alternative treatment program on the offender every five years.

Corrections officials raised concerns over the expansion of residential patients to the jail population.

"You do see in the governor's budget an expansion of DOSA beds," said Melena Thompson, Corrections executive policy director. "We believe that expansion will only address our current waitlist."

The Senate version has been referred to the Senate Ways and Means committee and the house bill moves to House Appropriations.

## WATER:

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up the slippery, mucky mess that once was his front yard.

On that fateful Thursday, his grown sons were in the workshop trying to save their old man's tools — his passion — when their dad arrived home from work about 10 a.m. The water at that point was still low enough to engender hope the tools might be saved — if the boys hurried. But in a flash all was gone.

"The water level was just going up and up, and my tools started floating," Potts said. "The situation was becoming unstable, and I just had to let the shop go. Within an hour of me coming home everything went to hell."

By 3 p.m. that day, the water had risen to waist deep, and by about 9 p.m. Friday night, telltale stains on workshop cabinets indicated the water had risen to 4 1/2 feet.

But despite the calamity to his property and what he suspects is a "total loss" on his equipment, Potts finds great solace knowing his family survived.

"I had to pick between my sons and my equipment," Potts said. "I felt I had to get them out of there because it was becoming too unstable and could have been life threatening. That was the most frightening part of the whole thing — having my boys in there. But my family is OK, and that's what counts."



Paul Dunn / Nisqually Valley News

The backyard of Kit Potts' Nisqually Valley property on Monday, Feb. 10., is strewn with mud and debris after flooding inundated his land.

For David Potts, 35, one of Kit Potts' sons, the experience was surreal.

"It's been really hard watching what my dad's going through with his shop," he said. "Before you knew it there was this wall of water coming our way, and we just had to get out. It's just unbelievable. I've lived here for eight years and have never seen nothing like this."

Potts has lived on the 6th Avenue property for a year after transferring to the area for his full-time job with Terex Utilities, which manufactures aerial devices, digger derricks and auger drills for the electric utility industry. He also owns several adjacent properties on 6th Avenue occupied by his sons and daughters. All of those homes survived the flooding because they were high enough off the ground.

And though he's certainly grateful the homes survived, it was his shop of propane heaters, electrical and air tools, saws, a rototiller, pressure washers, a refrigerator and brand-new cabinets that had been destined for his

home kitchen that seemed to be his passion. He used much of the equipment to sculpt metal, repair automobiles, and forge knives — supplemental income to his Terex job.

"All the years accumulating the tools and the cost ... and now losing them is devastating," he said, looking down and shaking his head.

Pott's wife Karen feels the loss, too.

Potts, 54, who's been married to Kit for 30 years, survived her "very first experience" with floods, but will undoubtedly recall the event for a lifetime.

"I went out to my porch as the water began rising and thought 'Oh my gosh, how can this be happening?' I was in shock. It all happened so quickly that it didn't give you time to think. You just had to react."

By the time she and Kit arrived home at about 11 a.m. Saturday — after staying in a hotel Thursday and Friday nights — she was both relieved and saddened.

"I was relieved the house was OK, but saddened for my husband



David Potts sets flame to a makeshift fireplace Monday, Feb. 10., on his father's Nisqually Valley property to offer Dad and his brothers warmth as they clear the land of mud and debris that accumulated due to recent flooding.

because his life's work was in that shop."

And now Potts doesn't have much choice but to hope — and remain optimistic.

"We need to be able to access the shop, get things out, and see how much — if anything — we can salvage," he said.

Standing near his dad in the

quagmire of a yard that Thursday, David Potts had lit a makeshift fireplace inside a metal container stuffed with kindling — doing what he could to offset the the portable heaters the floods had ruined.

"We're just trying to stay warm in the muck," he said with a wry grin.

## INFANT:

Continued From Page A1

Court documents detail Hammonds' account of the day of her daughter's death. She said she and her daughter were picked up by a friend named Bob in order for Hammonds to make it to a court appearance. When the girl became fussy, she noted that they stopped the car and she got out and rocked her. By the time the girl was calm, Hammonds said she had already missed her court date, so Hammonds and the baby girl were dropped off at home.

Hammonds said her daughter, born five weeks premature last October, was teething but was fine after the morning trip and slept "almost all day." She had multiple feedings and diaper

changes, Hammonds said. That afternoon, the girl fell asleep in a child swing, but awoke crying again at about 3:30 p.m.

Hammonds said she placed the girl in a horseshoe-shaped pillow on her bed before she herself fell asleep on the bed.

She said she awoke and noticed that the baby was lying on her side with her face turned toward a pillow. When she picked the girl up, she said she could tell she was no longer breathing. She told detectives that she picked the baby up and ran screaming for her neighbor to call 911. Hammonds began performing CPR as instructed by a dispatcher until medics arrived.

Hammonds later spoke to a deputy prosecutor and provided the same account of the events as she had provided to the detective,

according to court documents.

The autopsy brought additional concerns to light, though.

On Sunday, Feb. 2, a detective was notified that the autopsy had identified at least three separate fractures to the infant's skull. The doctor who performed the autopsy told the detective that while there were no visible injuries to the infant's head, the "fractures were very apparent when looking at the skull itself." The doctor said the significant injuries were sustained without any externally observable marks.

A child abuse expert and the doctor conducting the autopsy on Feb. 4 showed the detective an area of pooled blood that showed the infant had been "violently shaken to the point where this could cause her death."

Both medical profession-

als said it was a case of "shaken baby" syndrome.

Detectives met with Hammonds Feb. 5 at the Thurston County Coroner's Office. She was adamant no one else was near the baby and that the results of the autopsy were false.

After being advised of her rights, she provided an interview during which she was adamant she did not cause the death of the girl and that no one else was around her.

Hammonds has a criminal history dating back to 1999 that includes theft, harassment, malicious mischief, vehicle prowls, DUIs and domestic violence assault, among other crimes.

An arraignment has been set for 9 a.m. Feb. 18. There will be a review hearing at 10:30 a.m. Feb. 10.

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