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Officials Warn of Potent Synthetic Drug Linked to Overdose Deaths in East Tennessee

Health and law enforcement officials are warning residents about a powerful synthetic drug connected to a growing number of overdose deaths across East Tennessee, including in McMinn County.

The drug, **N-propionitrile chlorphine**, also known as **cychlorphine**, has been linked to at least 16 overdose deaths in the region since late 2025, according to the Knox County Regional Forensic Center. Nine deaths occurred between late October and December, with seven additional deaths reported by mid-January.

Authorities say the substance has most often been found alongside other drugs such as fentanyl and methamphetamine. Initial cases were identified in Knox County before spreading to neighboring counties including Roane County, McMinn County, Campbell County, Union County, Anderson County, Claiborne County and Sevier County.

Officials with Appalachian Regional Healthcare say cychlorphine is estimated to be about **10 times stronger than fentanyl**, making even small amounts potentially deadly.

Joe Guy, Sheriff of McMinn County, said the county's fatality occurred near Athens in December when a man, identified as **Jacob Browning**, was found dead in a tent. Health officials say Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, remains the most important tool for reversing overdoses, though multiple doses may be required because of the drug's potency. Authorities urge anyone witnessing a suspected overdose to call 911 immediately to ensure rapid medical response.

According to the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education, cychlorphine may have first appeared in China in 2024 before spreading to Europe, Canada and the United States by mid-2025.

Source: *WTVC News Channel 9*

The City of Niota will be holding a public input meeting on Shaping the Future of Niota City Park as part of the city's 2026 Local Parks and Recreation Fund Grant Program. It will be held on March 17th at 3:30 in the Niota Community Building, 107 Green St. The public is invited to attend and share feedback.

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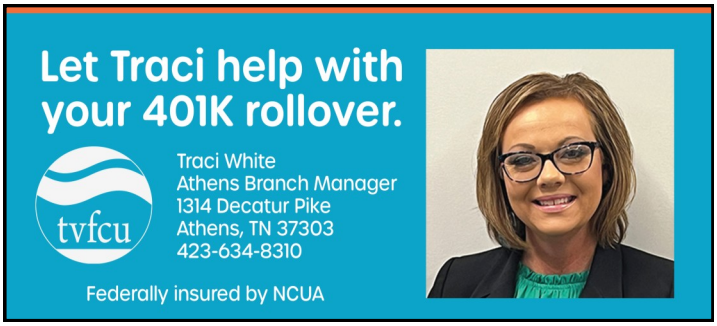


Grill Fire Causes Heavy Damage to Tellico Plains Home

Firefighters from several departments responded to a structure fire Tuesday afternoon on Walker Road in Tellico Plains, Tennessee.

The Tellico Plains Fire Department requested mutual aid around 3:30 p.m. from the Turkey Creek Fire Department, Conasauga Fire Department, Christianburg Fire Department, Notchey Creek Fire Department and Englewood Rural Fire Department after a house fire was reported on Walker Road.

Officials said the homeowner had been grilling on the back deck when winds picked up, carrying flames from the grill to the residence. The home sustained heavy damage in the fire. Additional agencies assisting included Monroe County Emergency Medical Services, American Medical Response from McMinn County, Fort Loudoun Electric Cooperative and the Monroe County Emergency Management Agency.

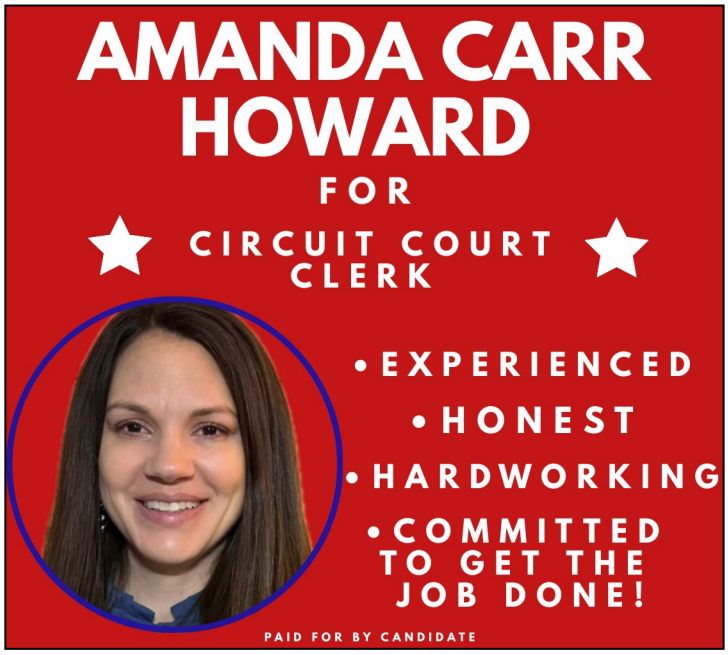
Alan Hayes, assistant chief of the Tellico Plains Fire Department, served as incident commander at the scene.

Photo provided by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural FD

Church News & Events

- Thomas Brown will be sharing the Gospel in Testimony and Song at Cambria Baptist Church, 805 County Road 875 in Etowah on Sunday, March 15 at 11 a.m.
- Trinity United Methodist Church will host its first annual "Carry the Cross" event on Good Friday, April 3. The 5K run begins at 8 a.m., followed by a ½K Cross Carry Walk at 9:30 a.m. Early 5K registration is $25 before March 15 (includes a T-shirt) and $35 afterward or on race day. No registration is required for the ½K walk. Participants can register online at **trinityumcathens.com/goodfriday5k**.
- Union Hill Baptist Church is hosting a revival which began Sunday, March 8, at 6 p.m. at the church, located at 258 County Road 659. The community is invited to attend.

More Church News & Events on Next Page



Church News & Events

- Mars Hill Presbyterian Church will host the seventh annual "Song for the Cure" fundraiser on March 14 at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. The event features a lineup of performers and will raise funds for the American Cancer Society. Tickets are $15 and can be purchased from Mars Hill Circle II members or at the door. The church is located at 205 N. Jackson St. in Athens. For more information, call 423-745-1403.
- Athens Lutheran Church, located at 710 Forrest Ave., invites the community to attend Lenten Worship services on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. through April 1. A potluck fellowship meal will be held each week at 6 p.m. prior to the service. The congregation welcomes all who wish to observe the Lenten season of repentance and reflection. More information is available at **athenslutheranchurch.org**.
- **St. Mary's Legacy Clinic** offers free mobile medical care for the uninsured. Anyone who is medically uninsured is eligible to receive care. ***St. Mary's Catholic Church (1291 E Madison Ave, Athens) is the McMinn County location and accepts patients every 3rd Thursday of the month.***
- **Celebrate Recovery** meets every **Tuesday** at 6:00pm at Woodward Ave. Church of God in Athens They also meet every **Thursday** at 6:00pm at Watts Bar Community Church in Decatur and Thursdays at **6:30pm** at **Spirit City Church North Etowah**.
- Community members interested in joining a mass choir are invited to a rehearsal Friday, March 13 (TODAY), at 6:30 p.m. at West View Baptist Church (2707 Highway 39, Athens). For more information, contact Theophilus "Theo" Arnwine at 423-405-8875 or find him on Facebook.

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Driver Escapes Injury in Athens Crash

A driver escaped injury after a single-vehicle crash Tuesday night on County Road 442 near Athens, Tennessee.

According to officials, the driver of a 2012 Hyundai Genesis failed to negotiate a curve around 9 p.m., causing the vehicle to leave the roadway and strike a tree.

Responding agencies included the Englewood Rural Fire Department and American Medical Response. The driver was evaluated but reported no injuries.

Ralph Creel, a deputy with the McMinn County Sheriff's Office, investigated the crash.

Photo provided by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural FD

College Soccer Experience Inspires Future Coaches

Collegiate soccer has long served as a training ground for leadership, resilience and vision, helping shape future coaches as much as successful players.

For many alumni of Tennessee Wesleyan University, the transition from player to coach grows naturally from the experiences gained during demanding preseason training, competitive conference matches and championship pursuits.

Beyond developing technical ability, college soccer teaches student-athletes to analyze strategy, communicate under pressure, build trust within diverse teams and balance academics with the demands of elite athletics. These experiences help cultivate emotional intelligence and strategic thinking—two qualities often essential for effective coaching.

Through film study, scouting reports and tactical adjustments, players also begin to view the game through a coach's perspective, often sparking a passion for teaching and mentoring the next generation of athletes.

McMinn County Arrest Reports

March 11, 2026

Cody Williams, 34 of Athens, charged with driving on a revoked license for DUI, Bond $2,000.

Casey Watkins, 33, charged with failure to appear for driving on a suspended license.

Anthony Taylor, 29 of Athens, charged with failure to appear for violation of probation for theft and vandalism, Bond $2,658.31.

David Hensley, 45 of Etowah, charged with theft of property over $500, Bond $3000.

Joe B. Cheek, 28 of Georgetown, charged with domestic assault, Bond $2000.

Those accused are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Information gathered using public sources.

Tennessee Lawmaker Proposes Ending Daylight Saving Time

Tennessee could stop changing clocks twice a year under a new bill introduced by State Rep. Chris Todd. House Bill 1300 would keep the state on **standard time year-round**, beginning in 2027 if passed.

The bill recently cleared the House Public Service Committee and now moves to the State and Local Government Committee. If approved by the legislature and signed by the governor, the change would take effect **March 14, 2027**.

Federal law allows states to remain on standard time permanently, but adopting **permanent daylight saving time** requires congressional approval. Currently, only Hawaii and most of Arizona — excluding the Navajo Nation — do not observe daylight saving time.

Daylight saving time was first adopted in 1918 to conserve energy and extend evening daylight hours, though it has been modified several times since. Tennessee passed a law in 2019 allowing permanent daylight saving time if Congress approves, but no federal action has occurred.

SUNDAY LUNCH
at Tennessee Wesleyan

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Dooley Tractor Company Named Blue Diamond Blue Chip Dealer

Dooley Tractor Company has been named the newest Blue Chip Dealer for Blue Diamond Attachments, expanding the equipment options and support available to customers in the Athens area.

Through the designation, Dooley Tractor Company will offer a range of Blue Diamond attachment products, including the company's flagship brush cutters along with other attachment solutions designed to help customers improve productivity and performance.

The Blue Chip Dealer Program is reserved for top-level Blue Diamond dealers and provides enhanced customer service, warranty support, marketing resources and specialized training for dealership staff.

Dooley Tractor Company customers will now have access to the full lineup of Blue Diamond attachments, parts and accessories, along with sales and service support through the dealership.

For more information, visit **dooleytractorcompany.com** or **bluediamondattachments.com**.

Obituaries

Edgar "Ed" Joines Cochran, 82 of Englewood, passed away peacefully on his farm in Nonaburg, Tennessee, on Tuesday, March 10 surrounded by his family. Cochran was perhaps best known as the owner and operator of Ed's Grocery in Englewood—a business he managed for 35 years from 1970-2005. Funeral services will be held at 7:00 p.m., Friday, March 13 at Bordwine Funeral Home. The family will receive friends from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., Friday prior to the service. Family and friends will assemble at Bordwine Funeral Home, Saturday, March 14 at 11:00 a.m. and go in procession to Cochran Cemetery for the 12:00 p.m. committal service. Bordwine Funeral Home of Etowah is in charge of arrangements.

Emogene Yvonne Smith, a cherished and nurturing soul, gracefully left this world on Tuesday, March 3. As a licensed practical nurse, Emogene dedicated herself to the care and comfort of others. Her compassion and gentle nature made her a treasured caregiver, and she was deeply respected by her colleagues and patients alike. Although her funeral will be a private ceremony, her family wishes to extend their deepest gratitude to all who reached out with love and support during her final days. Companion Funeral Home & Cremation Service is in charge of arrangements.

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