

COPS TARGET SERIAL KILLER CHIEF LINKS 3 WOMEN FOUND NEAR RAIL TRACKS IN SOUTHWEST DETROIT

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Three **women found** dead in Detroit early Monday were victims of a **serial killer** who preys on prostitutes, Detroit Police **Chief** Benny Napoleon said Tuesday.

Police have confirmed the identities of the **women** through fingerprints, but would not release their names, pending notification of their families. Napoleon said all three **women** had a history of prostitution.

"When you kill three people on three separate occasions, and leave them in the same location, then yes," you have a **serial killer**, Napoleon said. "It's very serious and we're taking it very seriously as a department."

Napoleon said it is too early in the investigation to have any concrete suspects.

However, a multi-jurisdictional force comprised of the Detroit Police Sex Crimes Unit, the Violent Crimes Task Force, the FBI, the Michigan State Police, Conrail **Railroad** Police and the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office has been formed to investigate the slayings.

"I want to make it very, very clear: We intend to solve these murders," Napoleon said. "They will be solved."

The bodies were **found** Monday around 8:30 a.m. in southwest Detroit near elevated train **tracks** at Military and John Kronk. A Conrail employee spotted one of the bodies near the **tracks** and called police. When officers arrived, they discovered two more bodies in a wooded area near the **tracks**.

The **women**, two white and one black, were reportedly in various states of undress.

Autopsies were performed Tuesday, but Napoleon would not say how the **women** died. However, investigators said Monday that two appeared to be strangled.

Napoleon said Monday that it was apparent that the **women** had not been killed at the same time because of the various states of decay. Tuesday, however, he said it was too early to tell how long they had been near the **tracks** because the cool weather could have played a role in decomposition.

Napoleon said the department has not been inundated with calls from families with missing **women**. At the scene Monday, as investigators canvassed the area where the bodies were **found** for nearly 12 hours, a few family members who had missing relatives came and went.

Napoleon said it would be nearly impossible to accurately measure the number of **women** missing in Detroit because they often wander back home and never report their return.

However, the **chief** is hopeful there are not more victims whose bodies have not yet been **found** .

Investigators were poring over forensic evidence Tuesday, trying to **link** the **women** in any way, Napoleon said. The investigation is being handled in a meticulous manner, he said.

"We're going to do whatever it takes to solve these murders," Napoleon said.

During a nine-month period in 1991 and 1992, a **serial killer** raped and strangled 11 **women** , many of whom had histories of prostitution and drug abuse. Several of the victims were **found** in abandoned motels and other derelict buildings near Woodward Avenue in Detroit and Highland Park.

Benjamin (Tony) Atkins, 29, was convicted of the murders. He died in September 1997, just four years into the 11 life terms he was serving for the slayings. Atkins said he was driven by hatred of prostitution.

Napoleon cautioned Tuesday that any disdain sometimes associated with prostitutes will not be tolerated in this case. "It doesn't matter what they did, they are somebody's daughters," he said.

* Anyone with information on the killings is asked to call a special hot line, 800-752-1121.

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Caption: Photo RICHARD LEE/Detroit Free Press

Police walk near the scene where three **women** were **found** dead Monday near train **tracks** at Military and John Kronk in Detroit.

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