

# Parx still confronting child-abandonment problem

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For all its success, Parx Casino in Bensalem has a problem it can't seem to shake: Negligent adults going in to gamble and leaving children alone in vehicles.

The latest incident - the 10th since Feb. 18, 2010 - involved a 29-year-old man, who was arrested and jailed Saturday after security officers discovered his 6-year-old daughter unattended in a locked car in the parking lot.

In a separate but similar case, Frances Casey, 39, of Abington, was charged Monday with endangering the welfare of children and will be issued a court summons. Police said she left her two nephews, ages 1 and 2, and a 9-year-old niece, in her automobile on July 16 - also for at least 17 minutes - while she gambled at Parx.

The Bensalem casino, consistency ranked No. 1 in revenue among Pennsylvania's 10 gambling halls, said Monday it was further beefing up security. Yet, the casino took measures last summer, when children were left in cars baking in high temperatures. Parx installed cameras in the parking lot, signage, and police patrols.

Parx spokeswoman Carrie Nork-Minelli said in an e-mail response, "We have the highest level of security and surveillance in place, thus identifying the situation in mere minutes on Saturday. The Parx security team vigorously patrols the parking lots every day to combat this type of occurrence, as well as any other inappropriate or unlawful behavior."

The casino, she said, works closely with the Bensalem Police Department in patrolling the parking lot.

Violators are permanently evicted from the property.

"This is the action of irresponsible adults, and we do our best to combat it with the highest level of security and surveillance possible," Nork-Minelli said.

Still, critics of the casino industry and counselors who treat addiction say that Parx's ongoing problem is reflective of gambling's addictive nature.

Jeffrey Beck, clinical director at the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, said 95 percent of those who gamble socially do not have a problem and use it as a form of entertainment and can control it.

"But for the other 5 percent, it becomes a problem, and often, a pathological problem," he said.

Six million to nine million Americans are pathological gamblers, according to the National Council on Problem Gambling in Washington.

Beck said the difference with Parx and Atlantic City casinos is that patrons "have a place to put their kids in Atlantic City. There, you have the Boardwalk, but with Parx, there really isn't [any place]."

No other Pennsylvania casino has had issues with tots left in cars that rise to the problems at Parx.

The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board said those charged with endangering the welfare of children are put on a self-exclusion list. So far, the board has placed eight individuals - all caught at Parx - on such a list.

"Since it keeps happening [at Parx], at some point, we need to think about fining the casino, as well as the parents, to force them to be more aggressive in policing the area," Beck said.

Doug Harbach, spokesman for the state Gaming Control Board, said no fines had been levied against Parx for the incidents involving children abandoned in cars. However, he said, the board requested a plan of action from the casino to mitigate the problem and is closely monitoring it.

The Parx review will now include Saturday's arrest of Michael Roytman, 29, of Huntingdon Valley, for leaving his 6-year-old daughter unattended for at least 17 minutes in his car. Roytman was charged with endangering the welfare of a child and recklessly endangering another person. He was arraigned and sent to Bucks County Prison in lieu of \$75,000 bail.

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