

5 bay area killers on short list for execution

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STARKE — Who will be the next to face execution in Florida?

On the short list: Oba Chandler, condemned for one of the most atrocious crimes in Tampa Bay area history.

The *St. Petersburg Times* on Wednesday obtained from the state Commission on Capital Cases a list of 19 death row inmates whose cases are considered "death-warrant ready."

Chandler's name is on the list, along with those of four other Tampa Bay area killers.

In 1989, Chandler murdered a woman and her two daughters who were vacationing here from Ohio. He threw Joan Rogers, 36, and her daughters, Michelle, 17, and Christe, 14, from his boat into Tampa Bay with ropes tied to weights around their necks.

"Any person who did what he did to a mother and her two daughters does not deserve to be on this Earth any longer," said Bruce Bartlett, one of the prosecutors who tried Chandler.

Gov. Charlie Crist's first death warrant was carried out Tuesday night. Mark Dean Schwab, 39, was executed at Florida State Prison in Starke for abducting, raping and killing 11-year-old Junny Rios-Martinez on Florida's east coast in 1991.

Schwab's execution was the first since corrections officials flubbed the Dec. 13, 2006, execution of Angel Diaz by piercing needles through his veins. Diaz took twice as long as normal to die.

Corrections officials made 37 changes in procedure recommended by a panel convened by then-Gov. Jeb Bush, who halted executions before the changes were made.

Crist signed Schwab's death warrant in July 2007, but executions nationwide were frozen while the Supreme Court reviewed a death penalty case out of Kentucky. Once the high court approved lethal injection, executions nationwide began again.

Schwab's execution Tuesday appeared seamless and peaceful.

Crist said this week that he hopes to speed the pace of executions. Since Florida's death penalty was reinstated in 1979, the state has averaged about two executions a year. Death row has swelled to nearly 400 people.

Crist "has indicated he intends to sign additional death warrants soon," Thomas Philpot, a Crist spokesman, said Wednesday in an e-mail to the *Times*.

Crist could sign any death warrant, but no governor since Bob Martinez has signed one that hasn't passed through all state and federal appeals, said Roger Maas, executive director of the Commission on Capital Cases, which oversees death penalty appeals.

The five 'death-warrant ready' killers

Gary Alvord

Murdered three women in Hillsborough County in 1973. Has been on death row for 34 years, longer than any other Florida inmate.

Oba Chandler

Murdered a mother and her two daughters vacationing from Ohio in 1989. On death row since 1994.

Charles Finney

Stabbed a woman to death in Tampa in 1991. On death row since 1992.

Dominick Occhicone

Shot to death his ex-fiancee's parents in Pasco County in 1986. On death row since 1987.

Milo Rose

Condemned for a 1982 murder in Clearwater. Dropped appeals and volunteered for execution. On death row since 1983.