

Truck Driver Killed in Two-truck Crash in Wyoming

SUMMARY

A 29 year old male truck driver died from injuries received when the truck he was driving rear-ended another semi as they were both eastbound on Interstate roadway. The truck the victim was following struck a wild animal in the right-most lane of the road and slowed abruptly as a result. The victim, who was driving an empty truck at an undetermined speed, smashed into the rear of the slowing vehicle, crushing the cab and collapsing the driver's compartment back against the truck trailer.

Law enforcement personnel arrived at the scene within four minutes of occurrence and requested an ambulance. Two ambulances responded from a hospital approximately 10 miles away, one arriving 16 minutes after notification and the second arriving seven minutes later. The victim was evaluated and placed on the first ambulance to arrive, for transport to the nearest hospital. Air ambulance was notified within two minutes of the victim's arrival at the hospital and the victim was transported to an out-of-state hospital 50 minutes later. He expired at the out-of-state hospital on the following day.

Employers may be able to minimize the potential for occurrence of this type of incident through the following precautions:

- **Insure that drivers are properly trained in defensive driving**
- **Schedule routes to provide drivers with sufficient sleep to maintain alertness at all times on the road.**

INTRODUCTION

On a Wednesday morning, November 23, 1994, a truck driver was in the right-most of three eastbound lanes on an Interstate highway when the truck he was following slowed abruptly after striking an animal on the roadway. The lead truck, which was loaded with refrigerated food, slowed to between 10 and 15 miles an hour, and was struck by the victim who was travelling at unknown speed in the same lane. The trailing truck, driven by the victim, was empty.

The roadway was dry concrete under clear to cloudy skies. The trucks were travelling on an upgrade as dawn was breaking, with the sun ahead of them. The road was well marked and there were no unusual road conditions or obstructed vision.

INVESTIGATION

Through a reciprocal notification agreement with the Accident Records Division of the Wyoming Department of Transportation, the WY- Wyoming FACE Project was notified of the incident on December 7, 1994. Reports were requested and received from law enforcement, hospital, and ambulance representatives and an investigation was conducted.

The investigation indicated that the victim had made no effort to avoid the crash, indicating that he was either asleep or was non attentive to the driving environment. On impact, the cab of the truck that the victim was driving pushed into the back of the van of the trailer ahead of him, breaking open the trailer doors and smashing the front of the victim's cab up to the windshield. The steering wheel was been down toward the victim's lap and the cab doors were inoperable.

The incident was discovered by an on-duty law enforcement officer who arrived at the scene approximately four minutes after occurrence. He immediately requested an ambulance and, before the ambulance arrived, requested a fire rescue unit with "jaws of life" capability to rescue the victim from inside his vehicle.

On arrival, EMT personnel noted audible respirations and matter flowing from the victim's nose and mouth. They applied oral airways and ventilation while awaiting the rescue team to remove the victim from the cab. After the driver's door and steering wheel had been cut away, EMT's placed a C-collar on the victim and removed him onto a backboard and placed him on board the ambulance.

On arrival at the hospital, the victim was intubated and x-rayed and a determination was made to send him via air ambulance to an out-of-state hospital. The victim was unresponsive with pupils slightly different and unresponsive. His body temperature was less than normal and lacerations were noted on the posterior head and forearms.

The victim was transported out of state via air ambulance nearly two hours after the incident occurred and died in an out-of-state hospital the next day as a result of the head injuries received in the traffic crash.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as head injuries.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

This incident could have been prevented by practicing greater caution in driving on Interstate roadways in the early morning hours. The absence of evasive actions suggests that the victim was not prepared to control his vehicle properly under unanticipated actions taken by the preceding vehicle.

There may well have been limited vision as a result of the time and position of the sun, but it does not appear that such natural conditions contributed significantly to the actions of either driver.

The fact that the truck ahead was fully loaded and driving at a greatly reduced speed may have contributed to the severity of the crushing of the victim's cab. The victim's speed, which is unknown but appears to have been at least as high as the posted 55 mph, was also considered as a contributor to the incident.

However, it appears that the seriousness of the crash, if not the crash itself, could have been minimized by careful attention by the victim to defensive driving practices, particularly attention to the roadway ahead.

FATAL ACCIDENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND EPIDEMIOLOGY (Wyoming FACE) PROJECT

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research (DSR), performs Fatal Accident Circumstances and Epidemiology (Wyoming FACE) investigations when a participating state reports an occupational fatality and requests technical assistance. The goal of these evaluations is to prevent fatal work injuries in the future by studying the working environment, the worker, the task the worker was performing, the tools the worker was using, the energy exchange resulting in fatal injury, and the role of management in controlling how these factors interact.

States participating in this study include: Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

NIOSH Funded/State-based Wyoming FACE Projects providing surveillance and intervention capabilities to show a measurable reduction in workplace fatalities include: Alaska, California, Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Additional information regarding this report is available from:

Wyoming Occupational Fatality Analysis Program
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Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-5439

Please use information listed on the Contact Sheet on the NIOSH FACE web site to contact In-house FACE program personnel regarding In-house FACE reports and to gain assistance when State-FACE program personnel cannot be reached.