

## **Trucker Killed in High Speed Rollover in Wyoming**

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### **SUMMARY**

A 56 year old male truck driver died from injuries suffered when the truck where he was a passenger left the roadway, crossed the median, struck a guardrail, crossed the opposing road way, and struck a bridge approach and bridge guardrail. The incident site was an off-ramp location. The tractor cab fell from the highway to impact against the sloped concrete berm below. It was pulled back onto the highway by the still connected trailer, then disconnected from the trailer and overturned in the median separating east-bound from west-bound traffic. The trailer continued to skid sideways, coming to a stop approximately 100' beyond the tractor.

The driver of the truck was the victim's wife. She was transported by ambulance to a hospital in the area and then by life-flight to an out of state hospital. The victim was trapped inside the tractor and was dead at the scene.

The husband-and-wife team were self-employed outside the state and were hauling refrigerated foods inside the state. The vehicle was west-bound, having travelled through a high desert region in the dark over a wide, sparsely-travelled, well maintained stretch of Interstate highway. The weather was clear, the road was dry, and the dawn was breaking with the sun rising behind them. In this high desert, the road is often visible for several miles in either direction, leading to a phenomenon described as "highway hypnosis".

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

- **Insure that all long-haul drivers are in good physical condition and maintain eating and sleeping habits that promote safety.**
- **Provide periodic training for all long-haul drivers in defensive driving techniques.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Early on a Wednesday morning, August 25, 1993 a year old truck tractor pulling a single truck trailer was westbound on Interstate roadway at a high rate of speed when the driver lost control on a curve approaching an exit ramp. The trailer carried refrigerated foods, and was travelling approximately 85 mph in a 65 mph zone. The victim was sleeping in the sleeper compartment of the truck at the time the incident occurred.

As the truck entered a gradual curve, it failed to negotiate the curve, striking a guardrail and preceding into the median. At this point, the median drops down to form the hill-slope of an interchange that runs below the Interstate. The vehicle continued to follow the median, striking the retaining wall of the bridge approach and the guardrail of the east-bound bridge, causing the tractor and trailer to overturn and slide the length of the guard-rail. The tractor, which was still connected to the trailer, fell off the bridge and down onto the sloped concrete berm, while the trailer continued sliding west in the east-bound lane for another 125'. The tractor was then pulled back up onto the median and into the guardrail where it came to rest facing south east. The trailer came to rest facing northwest across the east-bound lane.

## **INVESTIGATION**

Through a reciprocal notification agreement with the Accident Records Section of the Department of Transportation, the WY-Wyoming FACE Project was notified of this incident by copy of the Investigator's Traffic Accident Report on September 1, 1993. Information requests were sent to local officials and the investigation was begun.

The victim and his wife were self-employed from out of state, and owned a year old Van-type truck-tractor. They were hauling a load of refrigerated food across the state, and the victim was asleep in the sleeping compartment of the cab while his wife drove. The incident occurred shortly after sunup on a stretch of well-maintained Interstate roadway with two lanes of travel in each direction, separated by a median. The incident site was a point where the Interstate crosses over an access road and shortly east of an off-ramp.

The concrete roadway was dry and clear. The weather was warm and the sky was clear. The truck, pulling a single trailer, was travelling at approximately 85 miles per hour (with a posted speed limit of 65 mph), entering a slight curve to the right. Skid marks in the median indicate that the truck had already left the roadway when evasive action was begun, suggesting that the driver may have been asleep or otherwise inattentive. Based on evidence at the scene, the driver continued straight ahead as the road curved to the right, travelling across the median and entering the east-bound lane of travel, losing control of the vehicle as it crossed an access road and the median gave way to a concrete berm.

The tractor cab apparently fell from the roadway to the berm below as the trailer skidded from the median into the east-bound lane of travel. As the trailer continued to skid, it pulled the tractor cab back onto the east-bound lane on its side. The two then became disconnected with the tractor coming to rest some 100' short of the final resting point of the trailer.

The initial impact of the tractor was against a guardrail as it entered the median. The vehicle continued through the guardrail and median, striking the eastbound bridge approach retaining wall and the east-bound bridge guardrail. As the trailer overturned and slid west in the east-bound lane, the still-attached tractor fell off the bridge and down onto the sloped concrete berm below. The momentum of the skidding trailer pulled the tractor back up onto the median and guardrail where it came to rest on its side, facing south-east. The driver was partially ejected and the victim was trapped inside the vehicle.

The driver was transported by ambulance to a hospital some 15 miles from the scene, and was then flown to an out-of-state hospital. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene.

## **CAUSE OF DEATH**

The Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as thoracic trauma due to crushing impact to chest.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION**

This incident could have been prevented by driver attention to the hazards involved. The vehicle was being driven at excessive speeds and the driver was possibly asleep or at least inattentive to the driving process. While the injuries were compounded by the tractor cab dropping down to the concrete berm below, the roadway did not contribute to the incident. Protective guardrails were present. There were no defects noted in the roadway or to the vehicle.

It is difficult to enforce driver training in instances where businesses are family owned and operated. Interstate Commerce rules regulate some areas of driver safety, and Driver Licensing rules regulate other safety areas. Still, there is no "watchdog" oversight for family owners and operators of tractor cabs that are under contract to haul loaded trailers for another company. In a free society stricter oversight could rightly be considered over-regulation that places undue burden on small business interests.

As a result, there is a real need for greater emphasis on self-regulation for entrepreneurs to provide for increased safety to protect family members and employees who attain an familial relationship with the owners. While the need for freedom from government interference is recognized, there is also a need for responsibility by and for company personnel.

Family owned and operated carriers should insure, for the safety of family members and employees, that all long-haul drivers are in good physical condition; and should, as a matter of policy, enforce proper eating and sleeping schedules that promote safety. Policies should be strictly enforced that no alcohol, drugs, or medications that might impair safe driving practices be used during the period in which family members or employees will be subjected to driving hazards.

Particularly in the absence of company rules that require periodic driver improvement courses, family owned and operated carriers should, as a matter of policy, actively participate in defensive driving courses to at least the level of the National Safety Council's Driver Improvement course. Periodic updates or reminders of safe driving techniques are economically beneficial as a safe driving performance minimizes the probability of traffic fines as well as property damage and injury resulting from traffic crashes. Especially in family owned and operated businesses, the loss of a driver is not only an economic, but also an emotional, tragedy.

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## **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, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

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Additional information regarding this report is available from:

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**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.**