

Truck Driver in Two Vehicle Head-on Crash in Wyoming

SUMMARY

A 38 year old male derrick hand died from injuries suffered while driving a 10 year old pickup that collided head-on with a later model pickup that was pulling a triple axle camp trailer. The victim had passed another vehicle and was returning from the passing lane of a two-lane road in clear daylight conditions when his vehicle struck an oncoming vehicle to the passenger side of each vehicle. The victim's pickup slid down the right side of the travel trailer, spun approximately 170°, and came to rest on its wheels with the cab separating from the frame and coming to rest on the roadway. All five occupants of the two vehicles died from the impact, with the victim and his passenger being on the job and the occupants of the other vehicle being vacationers from out of state. Both of the workers had been drinking, with the victim/driver measured at 0.13 BAC and the co-worker/passenger measured at 0.08 BAC. The victim's vehicle was travelling at speeds in excess of 70 mph, on a two lane roadway posted for 55 mph as a maximum speed.

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

- **Establish and strongly enforce alcohol and drug abuse policies that include sanctions against drinking while enroute to field locations**
- **Provide driver safety education to employees who drive to remote field locations**
- **Require, as a condition of employment for employees who operate company vehicles or who travel on behalf of the company, evidence of a driving record that is free of DWUI or similar convictions**

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of Friday, August 2, 1993 two workers employed by a drilling company were enroute to an oil field location driving a 10 year old pickup. The victim/driver was employed as a derrick hand and his co-worker/passenger was employed as a driller. The vehicle was northbound at a high rate of speed and had just passed another car. While in the southbound lane, before returning from the passing maneuver, the vehicle met another car that was south bound and driving in the southbound lane. The two collided head on, with the point of impact in front of the passenger compartment of both vehicles.

INVESTIGATION

Through a reciprocal notification agreement with the Wyoming Department of Transportation, the WY-Wyoming FACE Project was notified by copy of the Traffic Accident Report on August 12, 1993. The crash occurred on a two-lane primary road that serves as a connector from an Interstate highway in the southern part of the state to another Interstate crossing the state in a north-south direction. The road was blacktop (asphalt) with a 13' width and 6' shoulders. The sky was clear, the sun was shining, the road was dry and there were no unusual road conditions. The road was straight and level with good vision in both directions. No braking action was detectable by either driver prior to the crash. The victim had a seatbelt but it was not in use.

Toxicological evidence requested by the law enforcement agency showed that both occupants of the victim's vehicle had Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) levels indicative of driving while under the influence of alcohol. The victim/driver registered a BAC level of 0.13 and the co-worker/passenger registered a 0.08 BAC. Wyoming law finds a BAC level of 0.10 as presumption of a Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) violation. Law enforcement investigators noted that the driver of the victim's vehicle was improperly passing and that the driver of the other vehicle was distracted.

Prior to impact, both drivers moved to the northbound lane to evade the crash, and collided nearly head-on, with the point of impact being to the passenger side of each vehicle. On impact, the victim's vehicle impacted down the right side of the travel trailer, and then spun 170° coming to rest on its wheels facing to the southwest. The cab separated from the pickup frame and the cab and engine came to rest in the southbound lane of the highway. The driver was ejected onto the road shoulder and the passenger was pinned inside the cab. The other vehicle spun 180° in the opposite direction coming to rest on its wheels several feet off the road surface. The trailer being pulled by the other vehicle came loose from the vehicle and then crashed into the vehicle that had been pulling it. Two of the three occupants of that vehicle were thrown from the wreckage and one was pinned inside. All five persons died as a result of the crash. Two of the victims were occupational and the other three were travelers from out of state.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as multiple traumatic injuries.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

This incident could have been prevented by following traffic safety practices. Had the victim been driving at the posted speed rather than exceeding the normal flow of traffic, there would have been no reason for him to be in the opposing lane of traffic and thereby posing a threat to oncoming traffic. Similarly, had the driver of the other vehicle been driving within the speed limit and, perhaps, more observant, he would have had better opportunity to avoid the crash. Since the crash occurred in the north-bound lane, it becomes obvious that the driver of the opposing vehicle could better have moved to his right onto the shoulder instead of moving to the left where multiple hazardous opportunities could exist.

The victim was involved in an improper passing motion that put him at risk by being in the wrong lane in the face of oncoming traffic. Basic defensive driving techniques warn against such a move on the grounds that, as it did in this case, the maneuver puts you at undue risk to be struck head-on by opposing traffic. Any worker who must drive as part of his employment should be given the opportunity to participate in driver education/improvement in some form.

Any form of alcohol or drug abuse should be prohibited as a fundamental part of any employer/employee relationship. There is no advantage to either the employer or the business to allow the use of alcohol or drugs in the workplace - whether that workplace is inside a building or behind the wheel of a car. Where workers must drive as part of their employment, employers should establish and firmly enforce company policy that prohibits driving when the potential driver has been drinking. That policy should include giving evidence of a driving record that is free of DWUI or similar convictions as a condition for employment. Any workplace risk that might exist otherwise, is synergistically increased by alcohol use.

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.

Additional information regarding this report is available from:

Wyoming Occupational Fatality Analysis Program
522 Hathaway Building - 2300 Capitol Avenue
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.