

Speeding semi-truck leads to four-vehicle collision, two fatalities

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 06 November 2020 06:52



A semi-truck failed to stop as it traveled east through a construction zone on Interstate-40 near Gallup Oct. 23, according to McKinley County Sheriff's Office.

As a result, the white Volvo semi truck driven by Paramveer Singh, of Ceres, Calif. crashed into three other vehicles — a blue Kenworth semi-truck, a blue Toyota Tacoma towing a trailer, and and a silver Chevy Tahoe.

The two people that died at the scene were in the Tahoe and were identified as identified as Michael Lee Rathbun, 63, of Centennial, Colo, and Kimberly Ann Cloud, 61, of unidentified city in Colo.

MCSO Sgt. Tammy Houghtaling arrived at the scene of the collision near the 4 mile marker after 2 pm.

Houghtaling made contact with several people who were helping to put out the fire inside the Tahoe.

After advising Metro Dispatch about the fire, Houghtaling retrieved her fire extinguisher in an attempt to extinguish the flames in the burning vehicle.

McKinley County Fire assisted with putting out the flames.

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Houghtaling then checked the cab of the Volvo, where Singh was trapped inside with an injury to his left forearm. As EMTs tended to Paramveer Singh, she went to check on the passenger, who was complaining of back pain.

As county fire fighters were trying to get the trapped driver out of the Tahoe, Houghtaling requested two tow trucks with sliders.

Next, she spoke with two witnesses at the scene. The first witness, Marvin, who told her he was behind the vehicles when they crashed, said Paramveer Singh was traveling over 60 mph and did not appear to slow down before the construction zone where both lanes merge into one.

Paramveer Singh allegedly struck the Tacoma that was pulling an enclosed trailer, and did not stop. The report states that Marvin said, "the semi did not stop and kept hitting vehicles."

The second witness at the scene, identified as Kristen, was traveling westbound when she saw the vehicles crash and stopped to help because she is an EMT. She was able to tend to Paramveer Singh, and then went to check on the passengers of the other vehicles. While most of them seemed okay, the passenger in the Tahoe died at the scene.

A third witness, Mark, told Houghtaling he was traveling east and also saw the Volvo fail to slow even as other vehicles did to merge near the 5 mile marker.

Houghtaling then spoke with Jaden, of La Pine, Ore., the driver of the Tacoma, who stated he had slowed down to about 40 mph in the construction zone. The Tahoe and the Kenworth were in front of him as he slowed. Next thing he knew, he was struck from behind and the trailer he was towing pulled him sideways and wrapped around his cabin. He could not see what was happening, but felt another vehicle slam into his truck. Neither he nor his passenger were injured.

The driver of the Kenworth, identified as Gurpartap Singh of Bakersfield, Calif., said he was

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traveling in the left lane and slowed down to merge when he was struck from behind and pushed into the guardrail. He said it was the Volvo driven by Paramveer Singh that hit him from behind, coming “fast and hard,” the report states. The guardrail, he mentioned, had been embedded into the passenger side of the truck.

Houghtaling spoke with Paramveer Singh and he said was “okay,” but stated “he did not know what happened.”

Houghtaling had a hard time communicating with Paramveer Singh, noting in the report there was a language barrier between the two. Gurpartap Singh translated on Paramveer Singh’s behalf, and Paramveer Singh said he had been transporting household items.

As the tow trucks arrived at the scene, Houghtaling noted the driver’s door on Paramveer Singh’s Volvo had been stripped in the collision. The truck was also missing a bumper, had a smashed windshield and an exposed engine.

The three other vehicles sustained extensive damage as well.

Coroner Richard Malone, of the Office of the Medical Investigator, arrived to assist with transporting Rathbun and Cloud, both of whom died at the scene.

Based on the investigation, witness accounts, and crime scene, Houghtaling determined Paramveer Singh was traveling above the speed limit in a construction zone and caused the crash, resulting in the two fatalities.

As of Oct. 28, Paramveer Singh is facing two counts of vehicular homicide.