

Brian Sandoval
Governor



Chris Perry
Director

Troy L. Abney
Chief
Nevada Highway Patrol

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Trooper Chuck Allen
Nevada Highway Patrol – Northern Command
Public Information Officer
callen@dps.state.nv.us
775-689-4680 or 775-230-4921

Media Release

Wrong-Way Driver Killed in Multiple-Vehicle Head-on Crash on Interstate 80 near Fernley

On Saturday, December 1st, at approximately 8:58 pm, the Department of Public Safety-Communications Center began receiving phone calls regarding a wrong-way driver on Interstate 80, approximately 15 miles east of Fernley. The vehicle was reported as a small silver sedan and observed traveling westbound in the eastbound lanes. A Fernley-based trooper was immediately notified and dispatched to locate the errant vehicle.

Several minutes later, the trooper saw the wrong-way driver near mile marker 52 and attempted to stop the vehicle. Despite the emergency lights and siren activated, and narrowly missing a collision with the wrong-way vehicle, the errant driver continued to travel westbound in the eastbound lanes. The trooper transitioned to the westbound lanes of Interstate 80 and attempted to get ahead of the vehicle and at the same time requested assistance from other troopers and deputies.

The portable road spikes or “stop sticks” were deployed to disable the vehicle near the Wadsworth area, yet the vehicle continued traveling west despite running over the device. At approximately 9:12 pm, the errant vehicle ultimately collided with three other vehicles near mile marker 39, or approximately 7 miles west of Fernley.

Richard S. Vogel, 21, of Mariposa, California, was driving his black 2002 Ford F-150 pickup that was pulling a boat trailer eastbound in the number one, or left, travel lane. He saw the wrong-way vehicle approaching, a silver 2003 Honda Civic 2-door, and swerved toward the right lane to avoid striking the vehicle head-on. The sedan struck the left rear portion of his boat trailer before traveling head-on into the vehicle that was following directly behind, a light green 1998 Dodge Ram 1500 pickup driven by his brother, 22-year-old Justin C. Vogel, also from Mariposa.

Moments after the Honda and Dodge collided and while both vehicles were still in motion, a fourth vehicle described as a white 2005 Chevrolet Silverado pickup traveling eastbound, driven by Barry J. Strickler, 64 of Elko, tried to avoid striking the two vehicles which were occupying both eastbound travel lanes. The left front of the Chevy struck the rear of the Honda.

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Mr. Strickler and Richard Vogel escaped injury while Justin received moderate to serious injuries and was airlifted from the crash scene by Care Flight and flown to Renown Regional Medical Center in Reno.

The driver of the Honda, 41-year-old Tonya Babashoff of Fernley, sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene. We will have to wait for the results of the toxicology report to know whether alcohol, drugs, or prescription medication contributed to the impairment of her driving.

Both lanes of eastbound Interstate 80 were blocked for about an hour to secure roadway evidence and diagram the locations of the involved vehicles. Traffic was then reduced to just one lane until approximately 3:00 am when all lanes were cleared and re-opened.

Trooper Chris Kelly of the Major Accident Investigation Team (MAIT) is investigating this tragic event. Witnesses, or anyone with additional information, are encouraged to contact him at (775) 689-4661 regarding case number NHP-121200751.



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