



## **Media Briefing on Highway 12 Crash Investigation Findings**

Tuesday, 12 August 2014, 10:00am

Montana Highway Patrol Headquarters, Helena

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Thank you all for coming this morning. I am Lt. Colonel Greg Watson, Deputy Chief of the Montana Highway Patrol.

On behalf of the Patrol, I want to thank the members of the press for their patience over the last two months. Though the timeframe for this investigation hasn't been out of the ordinary, we understand that the loss of six lives and the unique circumstances surrounding the crash have resulted in a heightened level of attention amongst the press and the public. Throughout the entire investigative process, however, our chief concern has been – and must always be – accuracy and thoroughness rather than expediency. Whenever a person dies on the highways we patrol, we take that very seriously.

On June 19th, at approximately 9pm, a two-vehicle crash occurred near milepost 54 on Highway 12, southeast of East Helena. The crash involved a 2002 International fire truck from the Three Forks Fire Department and a 1997 Chevrolet pick-up truck. The fire truck was traveling eastbound on its way to Three Forks. The pick-up was traveling westbound. Tragically, all six individuals in the vehicles died in the crash.

Our investigation into the cause of the crash began immediately. Captain Gary Becker, commander of the Patrol's district 3, led the effort with a team of five Troopers. The investigative process for this crash, as for all of the crashes we investigate, was meticulous. It involved steps such as gathering all information and evidence at the scene, examining the wreckage, taking measurements, making calculations, determining weather and road conditions at the time of the crash, and to the extent possible, reconstructing the chain of events that unfolded. This was a complex investigation, especially since there were no survivors and the vehicle damage was catastrophic.

In the course of this complex investigation, we consulted with the most experienced crash reconstructionists in Montana, including the ones who teach crash investigation at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy. We worked with auto mechanics and both vehicle manufacturers to get a better understanding of these particular vehicles.

Our investigation has concluded that a mechanical failure in the front drivetrain of the fire truck caused the driver to lose control and suddenly veer to the left, across the westbound (oncoming) lane of traffic. The driver of the oncoming pick-up truck veered to his right in an attempt to avoid hitting the fire truck, but was unable to do so. The fire truck and pick-up collided on the highway's westbound shoulder. The

impact ruptured a diesel fuel tank on the passenger side of the fire truck, which resulted in the wide dispersal of diesel fuel that caught fire soon after impact. Both vehicles were engulfed in flames.

The coroner's report indicates that the driver of the fire truck, Three Forks Fire Department Chief Todd Rummel, died from smoke inhalation while unconscious. The driver and passengers in the pickup – Matthew Boegli, Crystal Ross, and the children Brighton, Madison, and Peighton Boegli – died upon impact from blunt force trauma. Indications are that the two adults in the pick-up were wearing seatbelts, but the three children were not using seatbelts or any type of child-safety seats.

Regarding the mechanical failure in the fire truck, we have identified several parts of the front drivetrain that failed. Though we have been unable to determine which of these parts failed first, we do know that the failures occurred prior to impact and caused the driver of the fire truck to lose control of the vehicle. We also know that, prior to the crash, the fire truck had been in Helena undergoing maintenance to its water system, which is completely independent of the vehicle drivetrain.

In closing, on behalf of the Montana Highway Patrol I want to offer condolences to the family and friends of the six crash victims. As I said before, when anyone dies on the highways we patrol, we take that seriously, even personally. Our investigators and reconstructionists have invested countless hours into this crash have utilized all of their skill and experience to find answers to the questions we began asking as soon as we arrived on scene that night. They have done everything possible to ensure that this investigation is absolutely accurate, and I want to thank them for their dedication.

Thank you for coming, and now I'll take questions.

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