

STATE NEWS

Fatal I-26 crash claims seven lives

BY JEFFREY COLLINS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHAPIN — Rescuers knew the wreck was serious when they saw the crumpled Chevrolet Suburban rolled over on its side and the smashed up cargo truck on the shoulder of Interstate 26.

But it wasn't until they peeled back the Suburban's roof at 1:30 p.m. Monday that they realized it was the worst wreck most of them had ever seen.

"You had people on top of people," Columbia Fire Department's Battalion Chief Kirby Bishop said. "You can't imagine how many people were piled on top of each other in that little space. We had to move the dead ones off the live ones to give us room."

Six people heading to the beach were dead in the Suburban — five members of the Odom family from Asheville, N.C., and a Russian exchange student traveling with them, Richland County Coroner Frank Barron said.

The truck driver, Jim Harris, 72, also died at the scene.

Troopers said a tire blew out on

the westbound truck, sending it across the median and head-on into the Suburban along a stretch of highway with a 70 mph speed limit about 15 miles northwest of Columbia.

Many of the victims in the Suburban were wearing seat belts.

But Barron said the crash, which pushed the driver's side door nearly into the next row of seats, was too violent for many of them to survive.

Killed were Taylor Odom, 42; his wife, Marianne, 41; and their children Allie, 12; Lacy, 9; and Kirby, 7.

Also killed was a 13-year-old Russian exchange student whose name was not available.

Three of the Odoms' children were injured: Mary Taylor Odom, 12, who was in critical condition suffering from head injuries and a torn aorta; Able Odom, 16, who was in fair condition Monday night; and Kaitlin Odom, 8, whose condition was unavailable because she was in surgery, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Also injured was a 12-year-old Russian exchange student whose name was not available and who also was in surgery

Monday night.

Taylor Odom was the marketing director for The Cove, a retreat in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville that is home to the Billy Graham Training Center.

He was in charge of the grounds, hospitality and lodging for guests.

"They had just such a sincere love for Christ. They were a large family, just delightfully joyful and radiant and infectious," said the Rev. David Desforge of the Grace Community Church, who was planning to go to Columbia to minister to the survivors.

Witnesses said the aftermath of the crash was a horrible, eerily silent scene before rescuers arrived.

"I saw them get the jaws of life, and then they were just throwing clothes and sleeping bags everywhere," said Billy Ray Norton, who was driving home to Newberry when he came upon the crash. "I've never seen anything like it, and I hope I never do again."

Beach towels, suitcases, lawn chairs and boxes of oil filters and brake parts littered the highway shoulder around the Suburban.

The vehicle was so crumpled it was difficult to tell the front from the back.

The crash scene overwhelmed a few emergency workers, Barron said.

At least two police chaplains were on the scene.

"I think we've all had to catch our breath. It's easy to be overcome by a tragedy like this," said Barron.

Troopers took pictures of the accident from the ground and the air.

Orange spray paint marked where the truck crossed the median and the two vehicles smashed into each other.

A special accident reconstruction team will investigate the wreck, and officials say preliminary findings may not be released for a few days.

Transportation Department commissioner John Hardee said that investigation may bring up the issue of putting guardrails in interstate medians.

"If guardrails had been on there, nobody in the Suburban would have been hurt," Highway Patrol spokesman Sid Gauden said.

NEWS BRIEFS

■ Columbia couple named 'Parents of the year'

COLUMBIA (AP) — Chaplain E. Ray Moore Jr. and Gail Pinkney Moore have been honored as South Carolina's "Parents of the Year."

The award comes from the Parent's Day Council, a group that honors parents from across the country on the fourth Sunday of each July.

The Moores were presented their honor by U.S. Rep. Floyd Spence, R-S.C.

The Moores have four children: 29-year-old E. Ray Moore III, a lawyer and former regimental commander at The Citadel; 24-year-old Richard, a Southern Baptist youth minister; 21-year-old Dorothy, a newspaper writer; and 18-year-old William.

■ Education panel to examine students' job preparation

COLUMBIA (AP) — A state education panel has begun to look at how prepared South Carolina students are for the work force.

Gov. Jim Hodges said he wants the 29-member panel to examine curricula and identify "educational barriers that deter transition into the work force."

The group has an Oct. 1, 2001 deadline for its recommendations.

Doug McTeer, Hodge's chief education policy adviser, says businessmen tell government leaders they don't get "what we need for the jobs we have available."

■ War memorial to get update

CHESTER (AP) — The Chester County War Memorial building will get a \$1.5 million face-lift, beginning next month.

The county will close the upstairs and front section of the building on Aug. 1. The project, which is scheduled to be finished in six months, will include a new memorial plaza honoring the county's veterans.

Greenville-based Design Partnerships Inc. has created a new look for the 1950s-era building that is designed to mesh modern needs with its original purpose of honoring veterans of war, County Purchasing Director Corry Clark said.

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