

Two Injured, Two Killed in Highway 58 Crash

by Cheryl McDermott

A La Pine man and Cottage Grove woman were killed and two others seriously injured Monday morning following a two-vehicle crash on an icy section of Highway 58 about three miles west of Willamette Pass, said Oregon State Police. The accident occurred about 10 a.m. October 30 when a 2003 Chevrolet pickup towing a camp trailer was heading uphill (east) on Highway 58 near milepost 58 when it crossed the centerline into the westbound lanes of the four-lane highway.

The pickup was hit on the passenger-side by a 1997 Dodge utility truck registered to Midstate Electric Coop, Inc. of La Pine, according to a news release issued by Oregon State Police (OSP).

The pickup's driver and sole occupant, Laverne Ellen Wheeler, 58, of Cottage Grove died at the scene.

The driver of the utility truck was critically injured and transported by Air-Life to St. Charles Medical Center-Bend. He is identified as Dean Babcock, a 49-year old La Pine resident.

The utility truck's right front passenger, James L. Lester, a 34-year old La Pine man, was pronounced deceased at the scene.

The center front passenger, 48-year old Patrick Harry Barker, also of La Pine, was seriously injured and transported by Oakridge Ambulance to Sacred Heart Hospital.

According to the OSP news release, Wheeler was wearing a seat belt but use of safety restraints by the three La Pine men is still undetermined.

While road conditions were reportedly icy, the cause of the crash remains under investigation by Oregon State Police troopers from the Oakridge and Springfield offices. Oregon Department of Transportation managed traffic control while the westbound lanes of Highway 58 were closed during the on-scene investigation and clean-up.

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