

Two Killed in Fiery Semi-Crash on Highway 97

by Richard Burton

Two semi tractor-trailer trucks collided head-on and burst into flames on south Highway 97 near Romaine Village Way on Wednesday afternoon, killing both drivers and prompting a road closure which lasted several hours.

The two semi trucks were fully engulfed in flames and the southbound lanes were completely blocked when Bend Police and Fire personnel arrived on the scene at the south end of Bend about 3:30 p.m. November 1, according to Bend Police Lt. Ken Stenkamp.

Bend Fire Battalion Chief Dave Howe said several vehicle tires were exploding, and that an adjacent business was evacuated as a precautionary measure. "Firefighters were concerned with overhead electric lines, the possibility of hazardous materials on board, hazardous waste run-off from firefighting operations, and the possibility of fire spreading to adjacent properties," added Howe.

Both drivers, whose names were withheld pending notification of next of kin, died in the crash.

One of the trucks was empty and, the other was carrying eighty-eight 55-gallon drums of frozen juice concentrate, many of which were scattered over the highway, said Howe. Monetary losses were estimated at \$400,000 to the trucks, and \$50,000 to contents.

According to a news release issued by the Bend Police Department, a preliminary investigation determined the southbound semi tractor trailer rig was in the slow lane when the northbound semi crossed the centerline and hit it head-on.

Another collision occurred when a southbound pickup stopped quickly to avoid the crash and was struck from behind by another semi tractor trailer. No one was injured in the secondary collision, said Stenkamp.

Traffic was eventually opened to one lane in each direction and the clean-up continued into early Thursday morning.

The crash investigation by the Bend Police Department assisted by Oregon State Police is ongoing.

Two Killed in Fiery Semi-Crash on Highway 97 by Richard Burton