

Local

I-84 mega-crash

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Moments later, other first responders began to arrive.

While attempting to start the triage process, Taggart said, "Ryan and four other people literally had to jump over the guardrail to keep from getting hit."

From there, first responders began walking through the wreckage, knocking on windows to assess the extent of the damage and injuries. Taggart said they located the most critically injured—one person with internal injuries and another with profuse bleeding—near the back of the pileup.

And in the midst of removing and transferring patients to the hospital, more vehicles continued to crash. "So the scene kept getting bigger," Taggart added.

The fact that no fatalities occurred, said Taggart, "is amazing." He went on to say, "Amazing things happened. I can't speak enough to the people who were there."

Many on site credit a handful of bystanders for possibly saving the lives of the two most severely injured victims. "They kept them warm, still, and stopped the bleeding," Taggart said. "Keeping them warm and stopping the bleeding are the two most important things to do, and they did that."

Taggart believes the way the various responders came together over the disaster was "tremendous." He credits Dispatch, the staff at the hospital, the La Grande Fire Department, Life Flight, Oregon State Police (OSP) (one officer was heard over the radio as having worked a 22-hour shift), the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), the tow companies with employees working all day, and many others with handling a bad situation in the best possible way.

While the medical teams worked to get care for the victims, Donn Christy of Superior Towing was seated in one of his company's two on-site wreckers waiting for the chance to start clearing debris so that the freeway could reopen quickly.

"In my 17-year career," said Christy, "I've never seen anything like it."

Superior Towing arrived at the crash site around 5:15 a.m., Christy believes. His two wreckers, along with a host of support equipment ranging from lowboy trailers to heavy duty forklifts, entered the freeway through a gate directly onto the freeway, then had to go the "wrong direction" in efforts to reach the front of the crash.

Once at the scene, Christy and the incident commander made the decision to call in two additional tow companies, including local competitor, Roadrunner Towing, "for the sake and safety of the driving public. It was a real relief how we could all get along and work together once they arrived."

When asked what he first saw, Christy recalls, "I could see a severely jackknifed semi over the guardrail."

Christy went on to describe several other trucks and trailers, including two doubles, piled up against one another.

He said tow crews and others not essential for medical treatment were held off about 200 yards down the freeway from the scene while Hazmat crews investigated reports that hazardous materials, initially thought to be a load of blasting caps, may have been present among the crashed semis.

"They got Steve Ritch of S.R.E.C. there to check out the report of these blasting caps soaked in diesel," he said.

The hazardous materials turned out to be rifle (ammo) primers and the chemical involved was 600 gallons of hydrochloric acid.

Said Christy, "Steve went in to inspect the manifesto sheets to determine the risk."

The Hazmat Team eventually declared no leaks in loads.

"We had an inch of diesel running down the freeway at our feet," Christy said. "So even at that, it was pretty dangerous."

Eventually, the tow companies were allowed to approach and begin "pulling apart the wreckage."

Christy explained how OSP watched each part of the process to survey when wreckage was pulled apart, in order to reconstruct the accident.

"It was a huge undertaking for ODOT and law enforcement—all the agencies and first responders using all the training we've had—to get it cleared in 24 hours."

He said that several Ash Grove employees and other Baker County residents had been blocked in the middle of the accident, some waiting six to seven hours before the median was fully removed—no easy task—allowing them access out.

Christy's company is currently storing the salvaged cargo, which over the course of the coming week, will be picked up and distributed back to the companies that own the cargo.

"On a scale of one to 10, this was a 9.5 on my wreck-o-meter," concluded Christy.

While the tow companies on the scene continued the cleanup, news of the mega-crash spread to national news outlets while photos and video clips of the scene went viral.

Then, of course, the focus turned toward learning more about the victims.

Possibly the most widely seen photo was of Kaleb Whitby of Tri-Cities, Washington. Whitby told CNN that he ran into the back of a jackknifed semi, which caused his Chevy Silverado to flip, then looked up just in time to see the headlights of a second semi bearing down on him.

Whitby told CNN he closed his eyes and prayed.

Sergi Karplyuk, also on the scene of the accident, asked permission of Whitby before taking the now-viral snapshot.

Once extracted from the wreckage, Whitby required only band-aids for his arm and an ice pack for a swollen eye.

Included among the local



Photo released to media by Sergi Karplyuk.

This photo of Kaleb Whitby went viral after he survived being squashed inside his pickup between two semis. Whitby walked away with only an icepack and two band-aids.



Photo Courtesy of OSP.

The drivers of this torn-apart semi suffered injuries, but survived the crash.

residents trapped temporarily in the vehicular carnage were Travis Birmingham, Chris Combs, Don O'Grady, William Chandler, Charles Carrey, and Leroy Thompson, who did sustain injuries.

ODOT crews were also on the scene. Three men worked the night shift just prior to the accident, their shifts ending at 4:30 a.m.

Communications coordinator, Tom Strandberg of ODOT said, "We certainly will look at the information that is compiled from the crash debriefing. In talking with the maintenance folks right now it doesn't sound like they'd do anything specifically different. Crews were out through the area at 1-2 a.m. and they applied some sand as they went through that area."

Strandberg went on to stress what all ODOT crew members know—magnesium chloride or "deicer" is not effective in all weather conditions, and therefore, not always applied.

"Typically the policy on deicer," said Strandberg, "is if it's heavy fog they may not apply deicer because it will actually draw moisture from the fog and deposit it on the road. It overwhelms the deicer, then it freezes, so we get more moisture on the road."

Westbound I-84 was opened around 3 p.m., but eastbound lanes weren't fully open until nearly 10 p.m. that night.

According to OSP, consolidation of information among troopers on scene that approximately 26 vehicles or vehicle combinations were directly

involved in a crash. The estimate of total vehicles at the scene either involved in a crash or blocked between crashes is between 50 to 70 vehicles.

Twelve patients were treated for injuries at the St. Alphonsus Hospital in Baker City; six arrived by ambulance and another six arrived by third party.

After their arrival to St. Alphonsus in Baker City, one patient was transferred to OHSU in Portland with serious injuries, one patient was transferred to St. Alphonsus in Boise, Idaho with serious injuries, and two patients were transferred to the Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande for treatment.

Adding to the strain on first response personnel and volunteers, several other accidents in the area occurred the same day. A semi carrying a load of lube oil crashed, blocking the freeway seven miles east of Pendleton.

Another crash on Highway 7 below the dam sent one vehicle sliding onto its top into the Powder River, slowing traffic between Baker City and Sumpter.

Yet another crash happened about a mile up Highway 245 on Dooley Mountain, followed by one final crash for the day near North Powder.

At one point, Paizano's delivered free bread sticks to Dispatch, and The Truck Corral donated 30 free hamburgers to responders who might otherwise have not taken the time to eat.

While the definitive cause of the mega-crash is still under investigation, fog and black ice are listed as contributing factors.

Speed as a contributor to the pileup was still undetermined at the time this article went to print, with the final OSP report pending.

BCPD / BCNET make multiple meth arrests

On January 19, 2015, beginning at 7:00 a.m., members of the Baker County Sheriff's Office and Baker City Police Department executed two search warrants and served seven arrests warrants in and near Baker City. These warrants were the culmination of a two-month investigation by members of the Baker County Narcotics Enforcement Team (BCNET).

Search Warrant #1: Executed at 2860 Cedar Street.

Arrested at that location for warrants, stemming from Grand Jury Indictments: Jodene Inez Layton (12/28/1962), 2860 Cedar Street, two counts Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine) and one count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Roger Ray Miller (02/03/1965), 2860 Cedar Street, one count Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine) and one count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Search Warrant #2: Executed at 42534 N. Cedar Road #1.

Arrested at that location for warrants, stemming from Grand Jury Indictments: Danielle Christine Purkey (09/01/1980), 42534 N. Cedar Road #1, two counts Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine) & 1 count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Dennis Lee Page (06/17/1975), 42534 N. Cedar Road #1, one count Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine) and one count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Additional Arrest Warrants served, stemming from Grand Jury Indictments:

Heather Aimy Mae Winston (04/05/1992), 1209 Court Avenue (Served at that location), one count Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Bryson Scott Buchanan (02/05/1991), 1209 Court Avenue (Served at 1945 8th Street), one count Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine), one count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Arthur Michael Gentry (08/04/1982), 1440 13th Street (Served at 134 Bridge Street #106), two counts Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine) and two counts of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Arrested based on Probable Cause:

Kristin Rachelle Dejong (05/28/1991), 1440 13th Street (Served at 134 Bridge Street #106), one count Delivery of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Then later the same day about 3:10 p.m., Baker City Police served another arrest warrant, stemming from a Grand Jury Indictment. Arrested was:

Buddy Dean Otnes (11/26/1983), 1908 Chestnut Street (Served at 1768 Auburn Ave), two counts of Criminal Conspiracy to Deliver a Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

In addition to the Otnes arrest, Baker City Police also followed up on additional leads developed yesterday after the drug sweep, yielding two more arrests. They were:

Laura Feign Osterkamp (01/12/1964), 2845 Hughes Lane #25 (Arrested at that location), one count of Criminal Conspiracy to Deliver a Controlled Substance (Schedule II – Prescription Pills), one count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methamphetamine)

Mckenzie Jacob Sullivan (03/26/1993), 2845 Hughes Lane #25 (Cited and Released at that location), one count of Criminal Conspiracy to Deliver a Controlled Substance (Schedule II – Prescription Pills)

As a result of the search warrant service at 2860 Cedar Street, two additional charges were added to:

Jodene Inez Layton (12/28/1962), 2860 Cedar Street (Arrested at the Baker County Jail), one count of Felon in Possession of a Firearm, 1 count of Possession of Controlled Substance (Methodone)

This investigation will be continuing, based on further information gained throughout this warrant service operation. Additional arrests are expected.

Community Bank celebrates 60 years

On May 25, 2015, Community Bank (formerly Bank of Wallowa County) will celebrate its 60th anniversary. The bank is one of the 24 remaining independent banks in the State of Oregon (in 1982 that number was 88). Community Bank is now one of the last remaining independent banks operating in Northeastern Oregon and Southeastern Washington.

Since 1991 Community Bank has expanded significantly—from two branches and thirteen employees to 14 full-service branches and over 130 employees. In 1991, Community Bank managed and protected \$15 million for their customers. Today, that number exceeds \$320 million.

As a thank you to the local communities and customers, Community Bank is conducting a year-long Silver Sweepstakes to celebrate their 60th Anniversary. Each month 60 ounces of silver bullion will be given away - a 10-oz. bar to six lucky winners. Drawings will be held on the last full business day of each month (at each branch) with the first drawing to be held January 30, 2015. With fourteen branches, that will be 14 names advanced to the prize drawings. A random drawing of six names will determine the lucky winners for the month. Enter up to once every business day at a local Community Bank branch. There is no purchase necessary and a full disclosure is available at your local Community Bank or online.