

Semi driver dies in 11-vehicle wreck near Echo

By PHIL WRIGHT
Staff Writer

The season's first brutal wind storm resulted in an 11-vehicle pileup last week near Echo that killed an Idaho man.

Oregon State Police Lt. Mike Turner said five semi-tractors and six passenger cars crashed at about 6 p.m. Nov. 17 on the eastbound side of the highway near milepost 192, about a mile east of the turnoff for Echo.

William Hernandez, 47, of Caldwell, was driving one of the semis and died in the collision.

State Police from Pendleton responded at about 6 p.m. to another crash involving two semi-trailers and two passenger cars on Interstate 84 eastbound near milepost 193. One person suffered serious injuries, according to state police.

Troopers out of Hermiston at 6:17 p.m. responded to

several minor crashes on I-84 eastbound near milepost 192. State police in a written statement reported those wrecks occurred during high winds that limited visibility.

The National Weather Service recorded gusts in the area from about 4:45 to 7:30 p.m. that hit 55-60 mph. The winds kicked up a swathe of dust.

"Visibility was down to almost nothing at times," Turner said.

While troopers worked

their way through the minor collisions, they discovered the larger crash nearby. Emergency medical personnel from Hermiston, Echo, Stanfield, Umatilla and Pendleton were already on scene.

The wreckage trapped several people, Turner said, and crews spent hours laboring to free them. Ambulances then rushed injured victims to hospitals in Hermiston and Pendleton.

"The low visibility and

dangerous conditions hampered rescue efforts," according to a statement from Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services. "But first responders worked hard to stabilize the scene as quickly as possible."

Nearly 40 emergency personnel were on-scene for about five hours, Hermiston Fire reported. State Police and Oregon Department of Transportation workers assisted with traffic control and

scene safety.

Turner said the wreck closed the interstate in both directions for several hours. The westbound side opened first, and Wednesday morning one eastbound lane was open.

The wind started picking up after noon Tuesday and created problems throughout the day, including knocking out power for nearly 1,900 Umatilla Electric Cooperative customers around Hermiston and Pendleton.



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