

Another high-speed disaster on the 400



Angelika Crisp photo
The scene on Highway 400 around noon Monday, when a tractor-trailer left the road spilling fuel and causing traffic chaos

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In a crash eerily similar to one just 48 hours before, two young male drivers speeding on Highway 400 are facing serious charges in an accident that caused the death of a tanker truck driver Monday.

Early Tuesday afternoon, police identified the dead truck driver as David Virgoe, 48, of Innisfil.

The 11:30 a.m. incident Monday in the northbound lanes of the highway near Bradford closed the highway in both directions all day.

Angelika Crisp, sales rep for Metroland North Media, who was caught in the backup for more than an hour, described the chaos.

"It was full of cars, ambulances and police cars going on the shoulders. Then we saw fire trucks going southbound."

Crisp says it was near-30-degree heat prompted drivers to leave their vehicles for some air.

"(Besides the many other vehicles) there were horses in trailers. Folks were getting out of their cars and offering water to other people, and walking along the highway to see what was happening."

Crisp ended up having to detour off the 400 to reach County Road 27. She adds it was somewhat bizarre how she and other drivers did it.

"The police cut off a piece of the guardrail to allow us to get off (the highway). I've never seen that happen before."

The incident took place just two kilometres north of where a high-speed Saturday night crash in the southbound lanes, also involving two young drivers, left 11 injured and closed the highway in both directions for 14 hours.

Police laid charges of dangerous driving and criminal negligence against two drivers.

Two men involved in Monday's incident, both in their early 20s, are from Mississauga and Etobicoke. One drove a black Mustang, the other a green Pontiac Grand Am, and were taking friends to Wasaga Beach on a break from final exams.

They face at least five charges each, including criminal negligence causing death, dangerous driving causing injury and bodily harm and dangerous driving by racing.

The 21-year-old male driver of a third car, a green Honda, was charged with dangerous driving. Police determined the Etobicoke man was not directly or indirectly involved in the collision and his car was some distance behind the other two when the collision occurred.

The driver of a Jeep station wagon also involved in the collision was taken to hospital with minor injuries.

Several other witnesses described the Mustang and Grand Am travelling at high speed and weaving in and out of lanes before the crash occurred, just south of Highway 89.

"One or more of the vehicles caused the truck driver to swerve, hitting the centre median and then careening across three lanes of traffic and into a ditch," an Ontario Provincial Police release said.

On the opposite side of the highway, Jane Lennox, 40, was heading to Toronto with her 13-year-old daughter, Laura. She said she briefly stared death in the face when she saw the tanker come toward the guardrail and her vehicle.

The truck hit the guardrail and swerved back before ending up on its side in the ditch.

"I think he's a hero," Lennox said of Virgoe. "If he hadn't corrected himself, he would have hit us head-on and we would have been dead."

OPP Sgt. Cam Woolley agreed it was "probably driver action" that spared Lennox and others. Had the truck gone over into oncoming traffic, there would have been far worse carnage.

Police, he said, will treat the investigation as if it were a homicide.

- with files from *Torstar News Service*