



Vehicle Fatality

CAGC SAFETY ALERT

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Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors

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Safety Alert

03-01

The following incident has been reported to the CAGC.

Conditions

Poor visibility. Blowing snow –20 C.

General Details

On December 22/2000 at approximately 3:00 P.M. local time, while driving from Elswick 3D to Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Sightline Enterprise's 3500 GMC 4X4 was involved in a collision with a minivan on Hwy 35 approximately 38 km's south of Weyburn. The one ton truck was heading north on Hwy 35 with a snowmobile in the box, and pulling our GPS base trailer. There were two people in the truck at the time of the accident, both Sightline Enterprises employees.

Vehicle Details

The trailer is a 20 foot Wells Cargo EW 2024 – Express Wagon, model year 2000, tandem axle unit carrying GPS equipment, batteries and consumables, generator, heaters and other items required for operations of the GPS crew. GVWR of trailer is 7,700 lb. and is equipped with electric trailer brakes. The trailer was near new, well maintained with good tires and functional brakes.

The crew truck involved is a 1998 GMC 3500 4x4-crew cab. It is a four-door model, diesel engine, and automatic transmission with cruise control, daytime running lights, capable of carrying up to five passengers plus the driver. The truck is equipped with an electric brake controller, has a class 5 hitch with a heavy-duty insert. The truck was well maintained, had new brakes, tires and recent service.

Drivers Statement

While travelling north on Hwy 35 approximately 70–80 km per hour, visibility was 200-300 meters with gusting winds and blowing snow. I saw two vehicles approaching from the north and they appeared to be in the correct lane. The lead vehicle gradually crossed the centerline into my lane. I only had time to cut the steering wheel hard to the right to avoid collision with the oncoming van. The van struck the truck in the right front side; at the time I thought he had hit us near the back end of the truck. The truck/trailer unit went into the right side of the ditch and the next thing I knew the truck rolled onto the driver's side, 911 was contacted by cell phone giving them directions to the accident. The two vehicles ended up approximately 25 meters apart; the van was on the west shoulder of the road. I checked the other driver several times to confirm if he had a pulse and or was breathing. 911 operators were informed that the driver had no pulse. He was pinned inside the van. Police arrived first, first responders and ambulance arrived about 5 minutes later. Paramedics declared the other driver deceased.

Review Recommendations

This accident is still under investigation by the RCMP and any opinions stated here are merely that, and aren't necessarily findings of fault or liability, some opinions are based on assumptions until further information is available.

The GPS crew on Elswick 3D had been battling the elements since the start up of the program on December 15, 2000. Snow, blowing snow and poor visibility were considered normal daily working conditions. The crew had been cautious when driving to and from the field, and had on numerous occasions waited for conditions to improve or waited for daylight prior to traveling from Weyburn to the jobsite. On December 20th conditions were severe enough to shut the crew down and put them on standby. Safe driving habits had been discussed on a number of occasions and field conditions monitored daily and in some cases, hourly.

The driver of the vehicle was an experienced driver and had lots of experience pulling this trailer as well as others in all types of weather conditions. Given the conditions of the road at the time his speed was not deemed excessive. The conditions of our vehicles were not a factor in this accident. The inability of our driver to see more than 300 meters certainly was a factor as it made it difficult to see which lane the oncoming vehicle was travelling in.

Recommendations and Reminders

- Field supervisor to assess the driving conditions prior to traveling out in the morning and make a decision whether to proceed or not;
- Review, DAILY, winter driving procedures;
- Keep truck well maintained at all times. Don't travel on less than a full tank, make sure windshield fluids are kept up, maintain windshield and replace where necessary and make sure heaters are properly working to keep glass clear. Good tires and brakes and keep your front and tail lights clean;
- When traveling in poor visibility conditions, reduce your speed further as oncoming traffic approaches, as visibility drops slow down even more and turn on your emergency flashers to warn traffic coming from behind. If visibility becomes excessively poor, find a safe location to pull completely off the road and wait out the storm;
- When travelling in groups, stay together and travel at the same speed as the slowest vehicle. Stay in touch by radio to warn of oncoming traffic or worsening road conditions;
- Buckle up. Seat belts save lives;
- Assess your options to get off the road in an emergency situation, before an emergency situation occurs. Can you turn off the road in an emergency and hit the ditch? Are you able to come to a complete stop quickly? Is there an escape route for your vehicle?
- An additional tie down strap should be added to the center or front of a skidoo to keep it from flipping;
- A headache rack should be added to protect passengers in the rear seating area from flying objects during a collision or rollover;
- Do not drive while fatigued, stressed or ill.