

Semi that fell off Hwy 395 bridge just missed judge

By Paula Horton, Herald staff writer



Kennewick firefighters respond to a Monday wreck when a semi-truck went off the Highway 395 overpass and flipped at Highway 240. The driver suffered minor injuries, but was able to get out of the crunched cab. See story below.

KENNEWICK -- A routine drive over the blue bridge to the Franklin County Courthouse turned into a near-death experience for a Benton County District Court judge.

Judge Joe Burrowes' truck nearly was crushed Monday by a semi-truck that fell off the Highway 395 overpass onto Highway 240.

"I saw the truck coming over the railing and getting ready to drop right in front of me," Burrowes said. "I punched it. ... I honestly thought my number was up."

Burrowes said he got past the truck, pulled to the side of the road and said, "thank God!"

"I was lucky I was able to react," he said. "It was a very scary incident for me and obviously for the truck driver. It could have been a lot worse."

The driver of a semi-truck that slid off the Highway 395 overpass south of the blue bridge about noon has only deep gashes and cuts on his arms, authorities said.

Min S. Yu, 41, of Vancouver, was taken to Kennewick General Hospital.

"He survived because his seat belt was on," said Washington State Patrol Trooper Brian Bond.

Yu was driving a 2004 Freightliner semi south on Highway 395 and moved to the left lane to pass a slower-moving vehicle, Bond said. He lost control on the wet road and crashed over the overpass onto Highway 240 below, Bond said. No one on the ground was hit.

The driver likely will be cited for driving too fast for conditions, Bond said.

Burrowes said he saw Yu's semi straddling the concrete barrier for about 30 feet before the trailer went over and pulled the cab over and down.

Burrowes said it was like watching a movie in slow motion and he just reacted. He said his law enforcement background -- he spent 15 years as a Hanford Patrol officer and security specialist -- kicked in.

Burrowes said if he had time to think, he's not sure he would have reacted as quickly as he had.

Burrowes said he tried to call 911 five times but couldn't get through.

He said he jumped out of his car to check on the driver with another passerby who stopped to help. The two helped get Yu out of the semi.

The number of accidents near blue bridge has dropped since the \$16 million Highway 395 interchange project was completed last year, said Moe Davari, project engineer for the Washington Department of Transportation. About 24 accidents were reported from the end of February to April, he said.

In most cases, state troopers found speeding to be an issue, he said.

Highway 395 just off the blue bridge was grooved in February, he said. Grooving helps make the road surface a little bit rougher to help improve drainage and provide better wet weather traction for vehicles.

But drivers still need to adjust their speed according to weather and road conditions, he said.

About 60,000 vehicles cross the blue bridge each day, including about 8,000 to 10,000 trucks.

-- Reporters Sara Schilling and Pratik Joshi contributed to this report.

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