

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief John R. Batiste



Captain Jeff DeVere
Government and Media Relations
(360) 596-4010 – office
(360) 596-4015 – fax
<http://www.wsp.wa.gov>

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Contact: Trooper Brandy Kessler, Tacoma
Phone: (253) 606-1796 -cell
E-mail: brandy.kessler@wsp.wa.gov

Collision Involving No Seatbelt Use Turns Into a Miracle on I-5

A 2004 Ford Expedition was struck yesterday by a 1998 Honda Civic causing the vehicle to hit the cement jersey barrier and roll down a small embankment into traffic. Only two of the ten occupants were wearing seatbelts and three were thrown from the vehicle; one of those three was a two year-old child. Miraculously, all survived the devastating collision.

Orlando Castillo Mercado, a 20 year-old of Federal Way, was driving southbound I-5 at the Dupont exit when he lost control of his vehicle. He struck the 2004 Ford Expedition driven by 31 year old Vaiamoe Mafaaki of Tacoma. The Expedition struck the cement jersey barrier and rolled over the top of the barrier, rolling down a small embankment and into the southbound lanes of I-5 traffic.

The driver and 13 year old male passenger stated they were both wearing their seatbelts, but the other eight passengers in the vehicle were not. Vallelia Atonio, a 41 year-old of Tacoma, was thrown from the Expedition and suffered minor injuries. Atonio was originally listed as a pregnant female and after further investigation it was discovered that she was NOT pregnant. Two of the eight children, a 2 year-old male (originally listed as 3) and a 9 year-old female (originally listed as 6), were also thrown from the vehicle. These two children were transported to Mary Bridge Children's Hospital in Tacoma as critical. A few hours later the 2 year-old male was airlifted to Harborview with a possible head injury. All others in the vehicle were transported with minor injuries.

This morning the state patrol was advised that the two year-old male and 9 year-old female are going to be ok. The diagnoses of current injuries are unknown at this time.

This crash is an example of why it is so important to always wear your seatbelt and put your children in infant/child car seats or booster seats. There was no intrusion into the passenger area of the Ford Expedition; all major damage was to the outside of the vehicle. The severity of this collision could have been avoided if all occupants would have been wearing seatbelts and the child would have been in a child restraint system. Thankfully, the outcome of this crash was a miracle and lives were spared. On

completion of the investigation the driver will receive, at a minimum, infractions for violations of the seatbelt laws.

The state patrol continues to educate the public by ticketing those not wearing their seatbelts or who have their children unrestrained or improperly restrained in the vehicle. Our ultimate goal is to save lives. So remember; BUCKLE UP, it's the law!

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