

Fatal collision at border crossing still under investigation

BY ZOE DEAL

A Washington man was arrested following the fatal two-vehicle collision at the Peace Arch border crossing that occurred on May 2, said Surrey RCMP.

Police are still investigating the collision, which occurred before 11:30 a.m. and resulted in one fatality and one person injured.

The crash involved a black Porsche Cayenne SUV and a Toyota Sienna van. The sole occupant of the Toyota, a male driver, was pronounced dead at the scene, according to the Surrey RCMP.

In a GoFundMe campaign, the victim was identified as Tom Cheung, a B.C. pastor. The GoFundMe campaign had raised more than \$33,000 for Cheung's family as of Wednesday.

The driver of the Porsche was arrested at the scene and taken to a hospital for non-life threatening injuries. He was released on May 3 pending the outcome of the investigation, police said.

The collision occurred south of the border crossing but on Canadian territory, putting it in the jurisdiction of the RCMP.

Peace Arch Provincial Park employee Mitchell Gerhardt,

25, of Surrey was spreading manure in the garden bed, known for its annual flower flag display, when he saw the Porsche speed toward the border crossing at a high speed. It was his first day on the job.

"When I saw he wasn't going to stop, I ran behind the bushes," Gerhardt said.

Both cars became entangled as they mowed over a streetlight before coming to a halt in the flag garden.

"The van just instantly burst into flames," said Gerhardt.

Nearby residents recalled hearing a loud crash, followed by five or more explosions as windows shattered and tires burst. By the time first responders arrived, the Toyota was engulfed in fire and plumes of thick, black smoke filled the sky.

While it is not yet known whether gas cans were a factor in the explosions, concern about transporting gas over the border has risen in the days following the fiery crash.

"Gasoline is extremely volatile. Even just a small amount of static electricity or anything with a spark, if that gas can is open and there's fumes or a small spill, that can cause an explosion," James Cooper told Global News.



▲ A GoFundMe campaign identified the deceased victim of the crash as B.C. pastor Tom Cheung.

Photo by Zoe Deal

Cooper is an independent transportation safety advisor specializing in commercial transport.

Vehicles travelling through both sides of the border are allowed to transport 440 pounds of fuel per trip, according to border regulations.

It wasn't the first time a fatal collision has occurred at the bor-

der crossing. The remembrance spot for the 1998 crash that killed two teenagers was visible from the scene of Thursday's crash. In that incident, Julia Campagna of Seattle was relieved of any obligation for the crash due to temporarily psychotic behavior caused by an over-the-counter diet drug Xenedrine.

Letter carrier food drive happening this Saturday

BY ZOE DEAL

Letter carriers have a big goal this Saturday – to collect 6,000 pounds of non-perishable foods from Blaine, Custer and Birch Bay for the annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive.

This annual event occurs nationally and is the largest one-day food drive of the year. Letter carriers will collect food as they drop off mail at their normal time on May 11 in support of the Blaine Food Bank.

To participate, simply leave non-perishable food donations outside by the mailbox. Volunteers will assist by driving donations back to the food bank.

Each morning, volunteers at the Blaine Food Bank pack dozens of boxes with dry goods, produce, meats and dairy. All three food bank trucks embark in different directions, collecting goods from grocery providers around Whatcom County. It's a constant endeavor to feed the community.

"We keep hoping that we open the doors and no one will be here," said Sally Church, acting director of the Blaine Food Bank. "But the numbers keep increasing."

Church said visits have gone up by at least 30 percent in the last two years. About two million pounds of food come in and go out of the food bank's doors yearly. That comes out to roughly 6,000 pounds a day, Church calculated.

Spring is often difficult for the food bank.

"[The drive] is very essential. We depend on it to get us through," Church said.

A separate food drive around

Thanksgiving has to hold the food bank over until summer when fresh produce comes in from local farms.

"This week we'll serve over 400 families," Church said. "It's a difficult time. The shelves are empty."

For anyone unavailable when their letter carrier comes around, the food bank is staffed 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday. New volunteers are always accepted, and Church specified they are currently looking for weekend drivers.

For the food drive, postmaster Val Pikalov said they are still looking for volunteer drivers, "the more the merrier."

Interested parties can reach out to the food bank to be placed where there is need.

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