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Marinette County

One Person Dead in Methanol Tanker Crash

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The driver of a car is dead and the driver of a tanker truck is recovering after a fiery crash in Marinette County created a dangerous situation for the surrounding area.

The car and a tanker hauling methanol collided on Highway 141 around 12:30 Friday afternoon in the Town of Amberg. At 10 o'clock that stretch of Highway 141 was still shut down.

Authorities tell us the collision was nearly head-on. A witness to the crash affirms this.

Francis Beattie told us he was driving north on Highway 141 behind another car as the southbound tanker approached them.

"I can't say for sure, but it looked to me like the semi was over the line, about like that, and kind of, 'Wham,' the car went spinning and here comes this ball of fire, and I could feel it right through the window."

The collision caused a tremendous explosion. Not only were dangerous chemicals released into the air, but flames shot out, catching grass on fire up and down Highway 141 at least a quarter of a mile from the scene.

Since the semi was hauling methanol, a hazardous materials team responded.

Marinette County Emergency Management issued an urgent warning to anyone within a half-mile of the crash scene to get indoors immediately, and to shut and seal doors and windows.

A community center was set up as a shelter for anyone needing a place to go, but no one showed up.

It's not known how much of the volatile methanol the tanker was carrying. Firefighters spent hours on the scene putting out hot spots.

By 4:30, fire crews had extinguished the burning tanker, and the "all clear" was given to those people who had taken shelter.

People tell us the road has a history of trouble.

Wausaukee first responder Rick Bub said, "We're all a little surprised. It's the third one we've had in the same spot in the last five weeks. The two previous ones were fatalities. They tell me it's a straightaway. I don't know what's going on up there."

The section of road remained closed while an accident reconstruction team worked the scene and

One of the reasons for the concern about this crash was that methanol is highly flammable and can become hazardous.

Methanol is also known as methyl or wood alcohol.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, methanol is a colorless, odorless liquid. When it ignites, the flame burns almost clear.

The EPA says if large amounts of methanol are inhaled or ingested, it can cause headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, and nausea. It's also hazardous if it touches the skin.

Synthetically-produced methanol is used as an additive in many things, from plastics to paint.

crews cleaned up the roadway.

"People coming north now to their cabin and so forth on a Friday night, if they could detour at Crivitz or Wausaukee and go west and then north, instead of coming this far north, we would appreciate it," Chief Deputy Jerry Sauve said.



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