

Where Is Windshield Object In Fatal Collision on Westbound QEW?

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Police have indicated that an object caused a 30 centimetre-square hole in the windshield of a car driven by a 43-year-old male and this event led to the driver's death this morning, September 1st, 2011. The location of the event was near Hurontario Road and Mississauga Road in Mississauga. It is puzzling however why police are unable to describe the object that made the contact. Police have indicated that the driver lost control of his Toyota Rav4, struck the centre guardrail and then travelled across all three westbound lanes into a wooded area near Mississauga Road after being stuck by the object.

Video of the site from a helicopter shows that, once the vehicle exited the travelled portion of the road it did so at a significant angle thus confirming that the vehicle did not simply roll off the road in a manner of someone falling asleep. The vehicles of sleeping drivers exit roadways typically at angles of 2 to 4 degrees and the angle shown in the video was much steeper. This does not nullify the possibility that some kind of drowsiness could have caused the driver to initially travel against the centre median.

Windshields of modern passenger cars are actually quite resilient to penetration because they contain a thick layer of plastic between the two sheets of glass, much like a sandwich. Consider that severe head-on collisions occur frequently and in many of these scenarios drivers or passengers do not wear seat belts. The result is that the head of an occupant in a severe frontal impact will strike the windshield with great force. In the many instances that I have documented such head strikes there was never the creation of a "30 centimetre square" hole. In severe cases the plastic interlayer might separate over short lengths but never would there be an actual square hole where the windshield material was missing.

There have been instances in winter where a windshield surface became very cold and then unusual holes could be generated when the windshield was impacted. But this is September 1st in a highly populated area, there is no way that such cold temperatures could have been present.

Holes in windshields have been created after a crash by emergency personnel who sometimes make cuts in a windshield in their actions to extricate victims. Such holes have also been created in towing yards where the "pitch fork" of a wrecker tractor is pierced through the windshield in order to carry the vehicle to another portion of a wrecking yard.

But if a "30 centimetre-square" hole was actually created prior to a crash then that object should still be present at the site. So where is it? Why are police unable to identify it? Why are no questions being asked? Hopefully, someone will explain shortly.

UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 2, 2011

Police continue to seek witnesses to the incident of yesterday morning on the westbound lanes of the QEW where an object reportedly pierced through the window of a westbound vehicle resulting in fatal injuries to the 43-year-old male driver.

Police have now confirmed that they have possession of the object but will not release information about the object's identity until they have spoken to all available witnesses. They claim that they do not know "...if the object had been lying on the roadway or came flying off a truck, hit the pavement and bounced through the windshield".

The refusal to release further information is a double-edged sword. Persons who might have witnessed something may not know its relevance but by becoming aware of the object's identity this could trigger their memory. The longer police wait in not revealing the object the greater the possibility that such witnesses could forget or even leave the area.

UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 4, 2011

The Toronto Star Newspaper is reporting further facts about this collision as follows:

"The fire extinguisher bounced numerous times on the asphalt then went through the windshield of the SUV.

Miguel Pena was hit in the head by the flying fire extinguisher, sources have told the Star.

The driver of the garbage truck stopped at the scene of the crash and cooperated with the police, police said.

It's not known whether it was a Mississauga garbage truck or one ferrying Toronto's waste to Green Lane Landfill southwest of London."

The Star's "sources" seem to have revealed the identity of the object without the official release of that information by police therefore it is not clear why the police were not able to do so. The Star article also states that police told them that "the garbage truck stopped at the scene of the crash and cooperated with the police". So if this was said to the Star why is it still necessary for police to continue to not disclose the identity of the object? By releasing the fact that a garbage truck was involved and that they have the identity of the driver the withholding of the identity of the object seems peculiar.

We have to be careful about the accuracy of the information provided by any "sources" since we do not know how knowledgeable these sources could be. For example, the information that the fire extinguisher bounced numerous times on the asphalt would have to come from someone very close to the police investigation since no one would get close enough to such evidence without official clearance from police at the site. Of course the statement could also be completely bogus. If the fire extinguisher bounced

"numerous" times then it would have the opportunity to lose its velocity over several seconds and it would have to travel a substantial distance. Additionally, such numerous bouncing would tend to bring the object closer the ground and it would not be explainable why the object ended up at a height of approximately 1.5 metres when the actual impact occurred. An object such as a fire extinguisher would tend to have elastic, non-energy absorbing properties that would tend to keep it bouncing many more times and over longer periods of time that if the object was something like a sand bag.

Given the number of vehicles that carry cargo and lose loads on Ontario's highway's it is enlightening that loose objects such as these are not reported as the cause of major or fatal collisions. Imagine that an object had actually been lying on a highway somewhere and a driver had to take emergency action to avoid the object and was subsequently killed. What is the likelihood that police would be capable of recognizing that the evidence they were dealing with was not related to driver error? Unfortunately, when there is a narrow and focused investigation and when police investigators do not have many years of experience to familiarize themselves with collision evidence, they miss the subtle differences in the facts. When the object goes through a windshield and is lying within the confines of the struck vehicle it is not that difficult to draw the conclusion that it could have been related to the death. Unfortunately when evidence is missing police simply draw the conclusion that the collision was caused by driver error.