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Ramp remains closed one day after fiery crash

Engineers examine damage to I-95 interchange after tanker overturns

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SUN REPORTERS

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A tanker rig overturned and burst into flames yesterday evening on a curving interstate ramp over Baltimore's South Hanover Street, killing the driver and sending a burning stream of its load of ethanol into the street below, igniting a row of parked vehicles, authorities said.

The wreckage burned for more than three hours as firefighters sprayed water and foam into the flames -- with the driver's body still in the truck cab.

His name and the company he worked for were not divulged last night, but the tanker -- which was carrying 8,000 gallons of ethanol -- was from a local



trucking company, said Cpl. Jonathan Green, a spokesman for the Maryland Transportation Authority Police.

Green said investigators have leads on the identity of the dead driver but were not ready to release his name publicly. "The subject was severely burned, and it may take DNA tests to

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confirm his identity," Green said. "We are working leads, and we are in the process of confirming who he worked for and who he is."

State engineers began a close inspection this morning to determine the extent of damage to the ramp. The interchange, which leads motorists from Hanover Street to southbound I-95 in South Baltimore, will remain closed indefinitely, Green said. Hanover Street also is closed in the area.

Green said this morning that structural engineers worked through the night but waited until daylight to take a more thorough look at the surface of the road and the supports. When the road reopens, Green said, "depends on what the engineers come up with. It's just too early to tell."

The cause of the 6 p.m. accident has not yet been determined.

Hundreds of spectators, drawn by the initial explosions, raging flames and thick smoke, stopped to watch from three blocks away along Hanover and other nearby streets yesterday.

Apparently no other vehicles were involved in the crash, Green said. But seven vehicles parked below, north of the ramp along the west side of Hanover, caught fire and were heavily damaged as burning ethanol flowed down the gutters.

Anthony Mapili, 33, who lives three blocks away, recalled a series of explosions. He looked toward the ramp and saw his 1992 Pontiac Sunbird and the six other vehicles being ignited by the burning stream.

"One by one, the vehicles caught fire," Mapili said.

As they did, their tires exploded, said Betty Ewing, 69, who was sitting on her front porch when she heard the explosion.

"It was boom, boom, boom, and then there were a lot of fire and smoke," Ewing said.

"It was like something out of the movies," said Ben Crandall, a city teacher who heard the explosions from the backyard of his home on South Charles Street and took photos as the first firefighters were arriving.

Steve Nash, 51, said he, his wife and friends were cooking outside his home on West Barney Street when he heard the explosions. "The flames went some 40 feet into the air on the ramp," he said.

When his sister-in-law, Georgia Nash, dialed 911, she got a busy signal at least 10 times, he said, adding: "All of a sudden, the entire neighborhood filled up with fire engines."

The city Fire Department's hazardous materials task force applied a "concentration of foam" to the fire on the ramp and was assisted by firefighters from Harford and Baltimore counties and from BWI Marshall Airport - the latter providing a dry chemical-fire suppressant, said Chief Kevin Cartwright, a



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department spokesman.

A float was placed in a creek below the ramp to limit the spread of any insoluble substance, Cartwright said, adding, "There's no environmental hazard to the public."

Near sunset, firefighters continued to aim steady streams of water into the flames on the ramp.

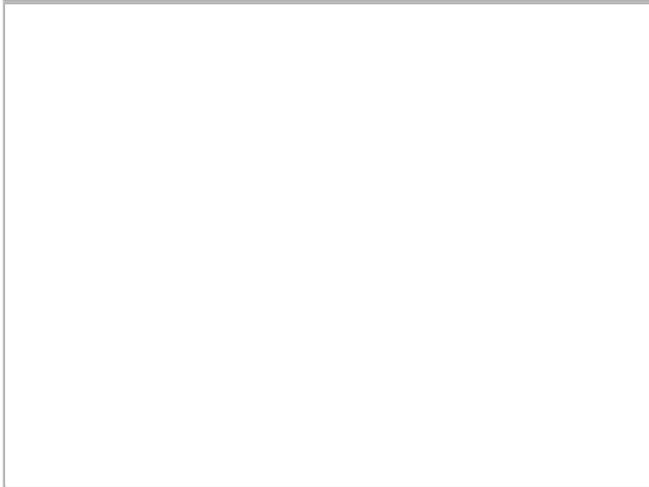
Below them on Hanover Street, Mapili lamented his losses.

He said he had "just put about \$2,000" into his Pontiac Sunbird, which had valuable fishing equipment inside.

"I loved that car," Mapili said. "Now it's totaled."

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