

Stanislaus County **SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT**

Sheriff Adam Christianson
250 E. Hackett Road, Modesto, CA 95358



MEDIA RELATIONS



**NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

DATE July 16, 2008
TIME 4:00 PM

SHERIFF'S DIVE TEAM RECOVERS BODIES IN DELTA MENDOTA CANAL

WESTLEY, Ca.- Members of the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department Dive team assisted the California Highway Patrol in recovering vehicles and bodies from the Delta Mendota canal after a collision near the town of Westley yesterday afternoon.

At 12:22 PM, Sheriff's deputies were dispatched to a traffic collision at the Delta Mendota canal and Needham Road in near the town of Westley. According to the 911 calls, there were two vehicles that had plunged into the canal after a collision. The first deputy arrived on scene at 12:32 PM and put in a request for the dive team to respond one minute later.

The dive team, which stores their equipment at the Modesto airport, arrived on scene at 1:50 PM. "We do not have a full-time dive unit," said Sheriff's Captain Tim David. "The deputies responded from their homes and their regular duty assignments in various areas around the county."

"Our dive unit is not designed to be a rescue team," said Sgt. Paul Yotsuya, Sheriff's dive team leader. "When we arrive, we are in recovery mode."

The swiftness of the current, the presence of debris on the canal bottom and the low visibility makes for a dangerous environment for divers in the canal. "By the time the dive unit arrived, there was no possibility of a rescue or recovering anyone alive, said Undersheriff William Heyne.

According to Yotsuya, the dive team moved as fast as they safely could. "The first thing we had to do was locate the submerged vehicles," said Yotsuya. "With zero-visibility, the divers had to work by feel. The searches are slow and methodical."

Nine members of the dive unit were on scene and eight of them suited up and were in the water at various times. Several of the dive team members made multiple dives. "We certainly sympathize with the families and what they are going through," said Heyne. "Unfortunately, there was nothing that we could have done faster, or differently that would have changed this tragic outcome."

After locating and removing the septic truck, the divers began searching for the Ford Explorer. When the divers located the Explorer, they were presented with a new problem. The Explorer was sitting under the overpass and the speed of the water in this area was much faster than it was in the more open areas of the canal.

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The divers made several attempts to hook a tow cable to the Explorer, but were unable to safely do so. After several attempts, they had to switch out divers due to fatigue and low air left in their tanks. The second pair of divers was unable to get a tow cable attached as well; so large treble hooks were placed on either side of the Explorer with a cable in between them.

The tow truck driver pulled on the cable and the Explorer was moved out of the swifter current to an area that would allow a diver to attach a tow cable to pull the SUV out. A diver was able to attach the cable and the Explorer was removed.

Four bodies were recovered from inside the Explorer and identified by family members at the scene. They are identified as Eliazar Cruz 19, from Bakersfield, Eulalia Garcia 34, Isaac Tapia 16, and Adan Martinez 22 all of Lodi. The body of Luis Perez 45, Merced, was recovered from inside the cab of the septic truck.

On Wednesday (07/16) afternoon, the body of Adrianna Garcia 17, Lodi, was recovered from the Delta Mendota canal several miles South of the crash scene. For information regarding the recovery of her body, please contact Officer Banuelos with California Highway Patrol.

The collision is under investigation by the California Highway Patrol.

For information regarding this press release please contact Deputy Tom Letras (209) 652-0134.