CONTAMINATE

A truck that crashed over Hinkson Creek contaminated 50 tons of soil around the creek with diesel fuel.

A tractor trailer transporting hot dogs spun out of control Tuesday morning over Hinkson Creek and crashed through a guard rail, exploding and killing a passenger.

Police officials said passenger Georgia Miller, 31, of Mobile, Ala., was killed in the 7 a.m. accident. Worthy Jackson, 34, the driver, was able to escape through the passenger compartment and was transported to University Hospital. Jackson, who lives in Clearwater, Fla., was in fair condition Tuesday night.

Officials did not say Tuesday where the tractor trailer was headed. Witnesses said the truck was heading west on Interstate 70 near the U.S. 63 intersection when it veered off course and crashed into the guard rail above Hinkson Creek.

The truck's diesel tanks leaked into the creek and its banks as the vehicle skidded along the guard rail over the bridge.

Police said the truck then hit a concrete pillar at the west end of the bridge, causing it to jackknife and crash through the guard rail, roll down an incline and explode in the median.

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"I could see the flames. I bet they were 10 to 15 feet high in the air," said Vicki Scruggs, who saw the crash from the Bob Evans restaurant. "You could see smoke down in the gully."

Ambulances, police cars and fire trucks converged on the scene. I-70 was temporarily closed, backed up for over two hours and limited to one-lane traffic for most of the day.

"We don't know what caused the truck to go," said Dean Martin, a battalion chief with the Columbia Fire Department.

More than 20 gallons of diesel gasoline were spread into ravine below the accident, but most of it had been cleaned up by the afternoon.

"Very little got into the creek," said Paul Scheetz, vice-president of Industrial and Petroleum Environmental Services, which was called in to clean up the spill. "They got a containment across (the creek) and got the fuel all soaked up before it got away."

About half a gallon of fuel made it into the water, Scheetz said. The rest was absorbed by the soil surrounding the creek.

"It wasn't as bad as it could have been," he said. "If it had continued to rain it would have washed into the creek."

Scheetz said about 50 tons of contaminated soil will have to be removed from the area and transported to the Columbia landfill.

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