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LOCAL NEWS

# I-40 Section May Reopen Monday

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Thanks to prodigious effort by repair crews, a three-mile strip of Interstate 40 near Valdese will probably reopen Monday. The road and a bridge above it were destroyed about noon Friday in a fiery crash of a tanker truck. The tanker was carrying 8,800 gallons of gas. The driver was killed.

Although approximately 40,000 cars travel this part of I-40 between Icard and Valdese daily, no other individuals or vehicles were involved in the accident.

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It was thought initially that the highway would have to be closed for a week for emergency repairs. Instead, due to non-stop labor by work crews and interaction of various county and state agencies, the projected re-opening of the highway is late Monday.

In addition to destroying Coldwater Street Bridge, the 1,000-degree flames also destroyed nearby trees, and by chance isolated a nearby group of 29 homes that use the bridge for access. An emergency road was carved by crews to give the residents a way in and out. They may have to use the road for up to a year while the bridge is rebuilt.

Crews removed the tanker's charred hulk and the interstate's concrete surface damaged by the blast. The highway will be topped with fast-

drying asphalt to speed reopening of the east-west artery, said NC Transportation Secretary Norris Tolson.

Authorities removed one body from the cab of the truck, Highway Patrol spokeswoman Sara Kempin said. The corpse was taken to Bowman Gray Medical Center in Winston-Salem for identification, she said.

The gasoline the tanker was carrying fueled a fire that turned the asphalt into liquid and melted metal bridge support beams and sent horrified drivers scurrying off the interstate.

“It was a huge fire. We’ve got scorched trees. You can tell it was a very hot fire,” Tolson said.

Witnesses told state troopers that the tanker truck flipped onto its side and skidded a few hundred feet along the guardrail. It then slid into the right side of the bridge and exploded.

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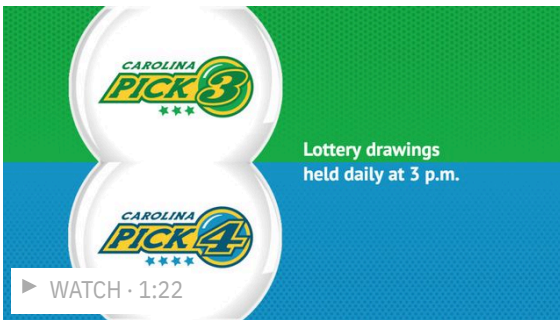
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