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## TRAFFIC

# FUNERAL HELD FOR BAY AREA FOOTBALL STAR KILLED IN CRASH WITH CONTROVERSIAL GUARDRAIL

In a story you'll only see on ABC7 News, a moratorium has been ordered on a controversial guardrail, but the announcement is not bringing peace to an East Bay family.

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By Dan Noyes

Thursday, November 13, 2014

OAKLAND, Calif. (KABC) -- An East Bay football player with big dreams was laid to rest on Wednesday after he was killed in a collision with a guardrail that's being blamed for highway deaths all around the country.

Caltrans announced on Wednesday that its crews will not install more of a controversial guardrail system until results from new federal crash tests come back. And a state senator is now calling for safety hearings. This all follows the crash-related death of a Bay Area football star.

Hundreds crowded into Oakland's Greater St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, paying their respects to 24-year-old Darryl Blackmon. The 6'7" defensive end starred at Berkeley High School, played at Kansas State and even tried out for the San Francisco 49ers in April.

"He meant something to so many people," said the victim's mother, Florence Blackmon. "Most of all, he meant something to me. My big baby boy, he just gave the best hugs."

His parents spoke to the KGO-TV on Tuesday about their loss.

"It is a deep, deep, deep gulf and you know you'll never get to the other side," said the victim's father, Darryl Blackmon Sr. "You'll never be filled, there will be no bridge, it's just always going to be empty."

Darryl Blackmon Sr. is a Navy recruiter. Florence Blackmon is a Berkeley parking control officer and longshoreman. They say the family's work ethic may have played a role in the crash. Their son worked all three of his jobs that day -- at the Sports Authority in Walnut Creek, as defensive line coach at Contra Costa College, and as a bouncer at a San Francisco nightclub. They believe he fell asleep at the wheel coming home at 4:30 a.m. on Nov. 1.

"He should not have been taken away in that, I mean if he fell asleep at the wheel, fine, but that equipment should've stopped that car," Florence said.

Darryl hit what's called an end terminal on the guardrail at the 101 Mill Valley exit. Here's how it's supposed to work -- the force of the car pushes the end terminal down the length of the w-shaped guardrail, flattening it into a ribbon of steel that curls off to the side. That process gradually slows the car.



But lawsuits filed after crashes across the country allege that the device called the ET-Plus can lock up, causing the guardrail to pierce the car. Or it can kick off to the side, allowing the car to continue on.



That appears to be what happened to Darryl Blackmon. His Chrysler Sebring hit a sign post and flipped upside down.



"It begs the question -- why are we still using this product?" said State Senator Mark DeSaulnier, D-Walnut Creek.

DeSaulnier is the long-time chair of the transportation committee. He has called for hearings and an audit of the Caltrans contract to purchase the end terminals.

"The fact that these are out there and they've been demonstrated not to work as advertised, and they continue to be out there just is unacceptable," he said.

Caltrans installed a new ET-Plus at the same location Darryl Blackmon died 10 days ago. They have no plans at this point to replace the thousands of ET-Plus terminals on California highways.

The Blackmon family has hired a prominent guardrail attorney to sue Caltrans and the company that makes the ET-Plus. And DeSaulnier has just been elected to Congress. He says he will make this his first big issue when he takes office in January.

#### **List of states that have banned the ET-Plus Guardrail End Terminal:**

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Colorado

- Connecticut
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
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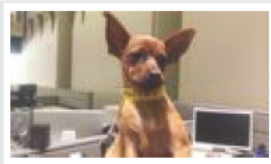


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