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Updated:
Thursday,
November 6
2014, 06:28
PM EST

Guardrail Impales Truck; Driver Not Hurt

UPDATE: The Tennessee Department of Transportation confirmed to NewsChannel9 Thursday that a guard rail at the site of a shocking wreck is indeed a type now banned in Tennessee and more than a dozen other states.

TDOT Spokesperson Jennifer Flynn said the Trinity ET-Plus guardrail end terminal was the product used on Highway 58 in Hamilton County at the site of last Friday's crash.

The same product was involved in several deadly crashes nationwide. Last week, TDOT pulled ET-PLUS from its list of approved guardrails to install. Flynn said they are waiting on the Federal Highway Administration to decide how safe it really is.

"We'll continue to work with them, and they've asked for further testing on this product. All of the state Departments of Transportation are in the same situation that we're in," said Flynn.

About 18 states so far have banned installing the ET-PLUS guardrail. TDOT said public safety is priority, but it will not remove those particular guardrails unless test results deem it unsafe.

TDOT says it will monitor those results closely. The FHWA has ordered Trinity Industries to do new crash testing on the ET-Plus guardrail to make sure it performs the way it should.

A guardrail crash is raising eyebrows for drivers around Hamilton County.

Last Friday, a crash reports stated a Harrison man drove his Nissan pickup truck northbound on Highway 58 when he had a diabetic, medical emergency, went off the road and hit a guardrail. The guardrail impaled the truck through the passenger side and went straight out the back, but the driver is unharmed.

Chattanooga drivers told NewsChannel9's Briona Arradondo on Wednesday that they were shocked to see the images of the crash.

"Well what I think is God spared his life," said Linda Taylor, of Chattanooga.

Danny Baker said he drives a pickup truck because he believes the vehicles are safer.

"The guardrail, I mean, you almost think there had to be something that was loose, or if it was already bent out or something for it to be able to do that," said Baker.

Jennifer Flynn, a spokesperson with the Tennessee Department of Transportation, said questions remain.

"Each crash is unique, and there could have been extenuating circumstances. We don't know what angle the gentleman hit the guardrail, how fast he was going, what else was going on out there," said Flynn.

TDOT maintains state highway guardrails, and the galvanized steel installed is supposed to prevent potentially serious crashes.

"Our traffic engineers look and see where the best places are, if it's a bad curve, if there's a place where we have lane departures. That might be a location where guardrail is placed," said Flynn, who said the state uses contractors to install the guardrail systems.

The barriers used along Tennessee roadways come from a federally approved list, and Flynn said officials removed a controversial product last week that was involved in deadly crashes.

Eighteen states including Tennessee are no longer installing the Trinity Industries ET-PLUS guardrail system. In a study obtained by ABC News, it showed deadly guardrail crashes were four times more likely to involve that product.

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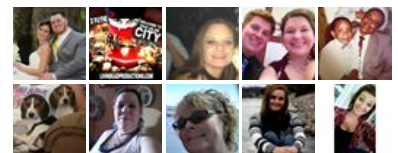
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While it is unclear what type of guardrail was installed in Harrison, people told NewsChannel9 that they want one less thing to worry about when they drive down the road.

"I think it's scary. I know it's possible because there are a lot of things that you can run into, things that can fall on you," said Katrina Smith, of Chattanooga. "For goodness sakes, you can be driving down the road and one of those lights falls down on you. I mean, what do you do?"

The driver involved in that crash didn't want to talk on camera, but he told NewsChannel9 he is grateful he wasn't hurt.

TDOT is reviewing the Trinity ET-PLUS guardrails that are already in place statewide along with the Federal Highway Administration, and it will wait to see what results come from its testing before a decision is made whether to remove the guardrails from the roadways. But any workers replacing guardrails in Tennessee will not use that product, Flynn said.

However, Virginia is the first state with plans to physically remove those guardrails from its highways.

By Briona Arradondo

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