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- Local News
- U.S. & World
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- Traffic
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- Politics
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- Health
- Entertainment
- Education
- Technology
- Pets
- Water Cooler
- Digital TV
- Blogs
- Money Savers
- Green Life
- The Investigators
- Immigration
- Most Wanted
- Polygamy
- Religion
- Fuel For Thought
- Lottery
- Horoscopes
- Services
- Auto
- Careers
- Lifestyle
- Beauty & Style
- Family
- New Baby
- Collections
- Video
- Slideshows
- In Our Area
- Community Calendar
- Contests
- Other Ways to Get News
- Newsletters & Alerts
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Aug 8, 2008 4:15 pm US/Central

Sherman Bus Crash Kills 15 Churchgoers

SHERMAN (CBS 11 News / AP) — A charter bus carrying a church group to a religious festival slammed onto its side and then skidded off U.S. 75 in Sherman early Friday. Twelve people died at the scene, one died at Parkland Hospital in Dallas and another died at JPS Hospital in Fort Worth.

A 15th victim, a female, died later Friday night, according to Wilson N. Jones Hospital and the Sherman Police Department.

A total of 55 people were on the bus at the time of the crash. Everyone was either injured or killed.

The bus smashed into a guard rail at about 12:45 a.m. on a bridge that is about 15 feet above a creek, apparently skidding along the guard rail before sliding off U.S. 75 just the other side of the bridge.

The bus came to a rest on its right side in the northbound lane of an access road. Workers righted the bus early Friday -- revealing a crumpled right side -- and were loading it onto a large flatbed truck. Other workers were cleaning debris and gathering luggage, shopping bags and scattered pieces of clothing.

As many as 10 ground ambulances and several more air ambulances took some of those injured to Parkland Hospital and other medical facilities including Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, McKinney Medical Center, Presbyterian Hospital of Allen and Harris Methodist Hospital in Fort Worth.

Some victims were even taken to hospitals as far away as southern Oklahoma.

A Parkland Hospital spokesperson told CBS 11 News that five people injured in the crash had been taken there. The Dallas County Medical Examiner's office said one person died at Parkland.

Baylor Medical Center in Dallas said two people were brought to the hospital via air ambulance. Another two also were flown to Methodist Hospital.

McKinney Medical Center told CBS 11 News that eight people were taken there, including one child. Two people were listed in serious condition and the other six -- including the child -- were listed in fair condition.

Three pediatric patients also were taken to Presbyterian Hospital of Allen and were listed in fair condition with non-life threatening injuries.

There were "very few walking wounded," Lt. Steve Ayers with the Sherman Police Department said in a news conference.

The crash severely damaged the bus, which came to rest in a creek bed.

Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church in Houston chartered the bus from Angel Tours from Houston.

Alcohol did not appear to be a factor nor did it appear the driver fell asleep, police said.

The 52-year-old driver talked briefly to police at the hospital, they said. He had a commercial license, but his medical certification required by the government had expired.

The group was headed to Carthage, Mo., for the Vietnamese Marian Days Festival, which began Thursday and runs through Sunday.

Marian Days was created in the late 1970s by grateful Vietnamese Catholics who survived the often treacherous migration to the United States. The event is designed to celebrate this safe passage.

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If you or someone you know is looking for information about a loved one who was on the bus can contact the American Red Cross at 1-866-GET-INFO.



The CBS station in Sherman (KXII) was there as triage crews treated the bus passengers. KXII

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Many of the travelers were Vietnamese and at least four translators were brought in, police said acknowledging the communication challenge.

Northbound traffic on the highway was shut down as ambulances and helicopters used the roadway and median to ferry the injured to hospitals. It took about nine hours to clear the scene, though roads remains closed while an investigation is conducted and road repairs are made.

Ayers called the investigation a "time intensive" process and said the departments would treat it as a criminal case to insure a thorough job.

It is believed that a blown out front tire caused the crash. Debbie Hersman with the National Transportation Safety Board said that the tire had been re-capped, a process meant to extend the life of a tire. However, it is against the law to have a re-capped tire on a front steer axle because, if it loses air, it could cause the bus to lose control. Re-capped tires are only allowed in the rear, where a bus has more tires and others are available to pick up the slack.

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Website, Angel Tours Inc. out of Houston just received an "unsatisfactory" rating June 23 of this year.

That rating indicates that there is evidence of "substantial non-compliance with safety requirements."

Friday's accident happened less than a mile from the spot where a trucker crossed the median and killed 10 people five years ago.

Sherman is located about 60 miles north of Dallas.

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