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MOTORCYCLIST KILLED IN CRASH WITH COPS

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Article Text:

Officers en route to possible overdose strike rider passing in no-passing zone

Crash: Motorcyclist not wearing a helmet

A motorcyclist died Monday night on N.M. 76 after being struck by Rio Arriba County sheriff's officers responding to an overdose report, according to Española police.

Levi Baca, 41, of Chili died at the scene of the crash, which occurred at 5:28 p.m. in Santa Cruz near the Santa Cruz de la Cañada Church, police Sgt. Christian Lopez said.

Lopez said Baca was driving a Harley-Davidson around a curve near the church and passing in a no-passing zone when he came upon three sheriff's officers headed to Chimayó. They were responding to a call of a possible overdose and an unruly person, said Lopez, who didn't have more details about the call.

The officers were eastbound at a high rate of speed with their lights on, Lopez said. Another car, driven by a woman who was not hurt in the crash, was traveling west. Baca was trying to pass the woman while westbound in the eastbound lane, Lopez said.

When a deputy saw Baca, he swerved to the right to avoid a head-on collision, Lopez said. The woman driving west slowed and was alongside sheriff's Sgt. Martin Trujillo as Baca headed toward the sergeant, he said. Trujillo also tried to swerve, but his car sideswiped Baca, Lopez said.

Lopez said Baca was thrown from the motorcycle before slamming into the rear of the woman's car, an impact that shot him back into the roadway.

A third officer, Deputy Richard Trujillo, also tried to swerve off the road, but Baca landed in his path and was run over, Lopez said. Richard Trujillo crashed his car into a fence but was not hurt, Lopez said.

Española police blocked the roadway during their investigation and determined the sheriff's officers were not at fault, Lopez said. "They were all running according to their policies and procedures," he said.

Lopez said witnesses told police Baca had passed several other cars in the no-passing zone. Police do not know if alcohol was a factor in the crash, though Baca's wife told investigators she last saw him that afternoon, and he hadn't been drinking.

Lopez said Baca wasn't wearing a helmet and was test-riding the motorcycle and thinking about buying it.

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Caption:

1. Española police close off a section of N.M. 76 in Santa Cruz where a motorcyclist died after

being struck by two Rio Arriba County sheriff's cars Monday
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