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Pennsylvania State Police Investigate Walnut Bottom Buggy Crash that Insured Three

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By Jim Tuttle

A Walnut Bottom traffic accident involving a Mennonite family in a horse-drawn buggy is still under investigation.

After a station wagon ran into the back of the buggy Monday afternoon on East Main Street, ***the horse broke free of the carriage and caused a second accident***, involving a sport utility vehicle.

"I'm not sure if the horse struck the SUV or the SUV struck the horse," said Dan Burkett, South Newton Township Fire Department chief.

Three people, a mother and two young girls, were injured in the initial crash, when a 1989 Chevrolet Celebrity rear-ended their carriage, according to Pennsylvania State Police in Carlisle.

The girls, an infant and a 7-year old, were flown to Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Burkett said.

"The 7-year-old had a head injury, and the infant was more precautionary."

While the baby didn't have any visible injuries, it was decided that she should be checked out thoroughly, because she wasn't riding in a child safety seat, he said.

The mother was taken to Hershey by ambulance, Burkett said. The father, Mark Reiff, 40, Newville, was driving the buggy and was not injured in the crash.

David Lee McBeth, 62, of Walnut Bottom, was driving the station wagon. He was also uninjured in the collision.

State police say the accident is still under investigation. No charges or citations had been filed by Tuesday afternoon.

After the initial collision, Burkett said, ***"the horse took off with the (buggy) rame and wheels"*** still attached, causing a collision with a 1999 GMC Sonoma.

The driver, Shawn Ballent of Elliotsburg, was uninjured but his vehicle sustained significant damage.

When Burkett arrived on the scene, he saw the aftermath of the second collision first.

"The horse was laying in the grass on its side ... I figured it was going to have to be put down," he said. "To my surprise, that wasn't the case."

He called dispatch to request a veterinarian to look at the horse. Burkett last saw the horse, looking as though it would survive, being walked down the road to a nearby Mennonite farm.

"They said they thought it was going to be fine ... it needed some stitches."

Burkett said car accidents involving horse-drawn vehicles are relatively rare in his area. He estimated that his agency has responded to "fewer than five" in the past 10 years.

"I'm surprised there isn't a lot more. There's quite a few (buggies) on the roads here, and the way people don't pay attention ... with cell phones and texting."

He added that the many twists, turns and hills found on local roads.