

Experts question MnDOT guardrail repair speed after car falls off bridge

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MnDOT guardrail under question after crashes

Traffic experts are questioning MnDOT's efforts to fix a guardrail on Highway 169 in a timely manner.

ST. PAUL, Minn. (FOX 9) - Traffic experts are questioning the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) for slow guardrail repairs, potentially opening the door for worse damage and injuries.

A car fell off a bridge during a crash on Sept. 29 after guardrail damage caused by another crash 16 days earlier at the same spot on Highway 169.

Headlights disappeared into the guardrail as a car veered off a Highway 169 overpass at Highway 62 on Sept. 13. The car rolled over, but the driver walked away from the collision.

Steve the Guardrail Guy has watched dozens of collisions like this after his daughter died in a guardrail crash in 2016.

He says the bullnose guardrail likely saved the driver from injury or death.

"Look at the success," said the YouTube poster whose real name is Stephen Eimers. "You prevented this person from going over what's called an elephant trap, the area between the two bridges. This is a beautiful performance."

But the guardrail was damaged.

In its place, MnDOT placed a cone of orange barrels as a barricade.

When a truck veered off the road in the same spot 16 days later, the barricade didn't hold and the truck fell more than 10 feet down to Highway 62.

"I'm like, 'Oh my goodness, They didn't get it fixed' and we saw a completely different outcome," Eimers said.

Traffic engineer Craig Moskowitz says some states reduce the risk of escalating collision injuries and damage by requiring repairs to safety installations like

guardrails within a short timeframe.

"It's okay to put in a temporary barricade or some kind of temporary barrier, but for an extremely short period of time," said Moskowitz, who is president of CLM Engineering Associates.

Minnesota regulations don't specify a repair timeframe.

Steve the Guardrail Guy says legislators should consider changing that. He watched with surprise as the driver in the second crash also walked away without major injuries, but he says MnDOT shouldn't gamble on the same outcome in the next crash.

"Luck is not a safe strategy when it comes to timely repair of guardrails," Eimers said.

The orange barrel barricade is back up again now, but the guardrail still isn't fixed, 20 days after the first crash.

FOX 9 reached out to MnDOT early Tuesday to ask about the repairs process and why this has taken so long, but they couldn't get us an answer by late afternoon.

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