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INFORMATION UPDATE – February 16, 2010 BELTLINE FATAL MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT – January 10, 2010 Incident Number 2010-00757

Investigator: Detective Chris Nadeau
Authorized by: Chief Michael Schirling

Burlington Police have completed their investigation into the circumstances surrounding the tragic traffic accident that claimed the lives of 20-year-old Taylor McLaughlin of Colchester and 30-year-old Michael Wagner of Colchester.

Investigation revealed that McLaughlin was southbound when his vehicle traveled fully left of center and the collision occurred. There was no indication from the physical evidence found at the scene or from witness statements that McLaughlin took evasive action (such as swerving or braking) to avoid the collision. Wagner's vehicle was in its designated lane of travel, northbound when it was struck by McLaughlin's vehicle. There is physical evidence that Wagner attempted to both apply brakes and turn his vehicle out of the path of McLaughlin's vehicle. He was unsuccessful and an offset frontal crash occurred.

The speed of the vehicles was not able to be directly determined given the evidence available, however, no indication of notably excessive speed exists.

An autopsy, now complete after the receipt of toxicology results, by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner revealed one item of interest to investigators. McLaughlin's toxicology screening showed that THC (the active drug in Marijuana) was present in his system. The level of THC was found to be 14.1 ng/mL (nanograms per milliliter).

Available research (citation below) on motor function impairment and operation of motor vehicles is substantially impaired at this level of THC. "...tracking is impaired when the levels of THC in plasma are 9ng/mL and visual functioning is impaired when the levels of THC in plasma are 12 ng/mL. In the present study, participants were found to be impaired on the variables 'straddling the barrier line' and 'straddling the solid line', consistent with the suggestion that tracking, attention and balance are impaired following the consumption of THC."

Forensic Science International 155 (2005) 172-178, "The relationship between performance on the standardized field sobriety tests, driving performance and the level of 9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in blood. K. Papafotiou, J.D. Carter, C. Stough

It should be noted that this is only one study relating to the effects of marijuana/THC on the operation of vehicles.

There had been speculation and questions regarding whether “texting” was a contributing factor in this crash. Investigation into that possibility was inconclusive and investigators were unable to rule in or out other possible distractions as contributing factors in this accident.