

2 workers killed in second van accident;
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Byline: Jonathan Gelb INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Body

A day after an overcrowded van filled with immigrant day laborers crashed on a busy Delaware expressway, killing three of them, two more people died yesterday in Lehigh County after a van carrying 18 Hispanic workers flipped over.

Yesterday's accident, which occurred at 7:45 a.m. at Route 309 and Mountain Road in Lynn Township, also left 16 injured, State Trooper Joseph Campbell said. The van's passengers, reportedly on their way to work at a nearby factory, did not speak English, police said.

Some of the 16 injured are in critical condition at Allentown Hospital, a hospital spokesman said. Police identified the two men killed only as Armando Cervantes and Sergio Lopez.

About 60 miles away, at Christiana (Del.) Hospital, Asan Wang, 37, nervously waited for news about his wife, Kusti Leman, 35, who broke a bone in her back and needed stitches in her face after the van flipped over on Interstate 495 in Claymont, a suburb of Wilmington.

The van was carrying 19 Cambodian, Indonesian, Thai and Pakistani workers returning to their homes in Philadelphia after working in New Castle, Del.

The accidents highlight some of the dangers that immigrant workers face as they struggle to adjust to a new country and find low-level jobs that many citizens would not do, immigrant advocates said.

Aldo Siahian, who works at the Indonesian Full Gospel Fellowship Church, which assists Asian immigrants in Philadelphia, said shady temporary staffing agencies that recruit day workers are common in some immigrant neighborhoods. For clients such as packing factories, poultry plants or farms, the agencies sign up workers for temporary jobs and usually pay them in cash off the books, he said.

Accidents are not uncommon, he said. In January, a van carrying Indonesian workers to jobs in Scranton was involved in a crash that left two workers injured. Such accidents usually leave workers without health benefits or workers compensation, Siahian said.

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Delaware State Police investigating Monday's crash said the workers were returning from Pack & Process Inc. in New Castle, Del. The company had no comment yesterday.

An occupant of the vehicle said the workers had been contracted by Lam Staff Service of Philadelphia, Delaware State Police Lt. Tim Winstead said. No such business is listed in Philadelphia.

Because of a language barrier, authorities are still trying to identify a number of the victims, including two of the three who died, Winstead said. The first two victims died at the scene; both were teenagers. The third person died at Christiana Hospital Monday night.

According to police, the van ran into a gasoline tanker, crossed the median and flipped over in the southbound lanes. Debris from the vehicle, such as glass, sneakers and tote bags, littered the roadway as emergency workers tried to rescue the riders.

A number of the van riders were partially or totally thrown from the vehicle, Winstead said. Though the van was carrying 19, it had seats for 15 people, Winstead added.

Yesterday at Christiana Hospital, ministers counseled the patients' family members, who waited nervously for news from doctors.

"I'm worried, anxious, fearful and confused," Wang said through an interpreter. He and his wife, who are from Indonesia, have been in the United States for three months. "I'm worried for our two children," he said.

Thorn Khem of Richmond, Va., also waited for news about his father, Lam Khem, 72, a Cambodian immigrant who lives in Center City.

"They said he's in bad condition," Thorn Khem said. "I'm nervous and it's hard to even talk right now. I can't even describe it."

He said his father had body and head injuries.

Pennsylvania state police said they are still trying to determine exactly what happened yesterday in Lehigh County.

Trooper Campbell said a car sideswiped the van on Route 309, sending it airborne and onto its side. Police said that some of the passengers were thrown from the van and that the driver, Jorge Perez, suffered "major injury."

Inquirer Staff Writer Monica Rhor also contributed to this story.

Jonathan Gelb's e-mail address is jgelb@phillynews.com

Graphic

PHOTO;

JOAN FAIRMAN KANES, Inquirer Suburban Staff

Asan Wang visits his wife, Kusti Leman, in her room at Christiana Hospital. Leman, who was injured in Monday's crash, came to the United States with Wang and their two children three months ago.

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