

Family sues Google after Maps allegedly directed father off collapsed US bridge

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Author: Abené Clayton

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The family of a North Carolina man is suing Google for negligence after he died from crashing into a creek below a collapsed bridge at the alleged behest of Google Maps, the Associated Press reported. On 30 September 2022, state troopers found Philip Paxson drowned in his overturned pickup truck beneath a bridge that had collapsed nearly a decade earlier. Paxson, who was 47 and from Hickory, North Carolina (about 60 miles north-west of Charlotte), was returning home from his daughter's ninth birthday before the accident, his mother-in-law wrote in a post on Facebook. She added that neither the destroyed bridge nor the road leading to it had any barriers or warning signs to alert drivers of the hazard. "It was a dark and rainy night and he was following his GPS which led him down a concrete road to a bridge that dropped off into a river," the post reads. "He will be greatly missed by his family and friends. It was a totally preventable accident. We are grieving his death." In addition to Google, the Paxson family's lawsuit names a number of private property management companies who were responsible for the land where the crash happened and for surrounding plots, according to the Associated Press. In a statement to the Guardian, a Google spokesperson said: "We have the deepest sympathies for the Paxson family. Our goal is to provide accurate routing information in Maps and we are reviewing this lawsuit." Lawyers for the Paxsons allege that several people have tried to flag the washed-out bridge to Google and have included email correspondence between a Hickory resident who tried to use the "suggest an edit" feature in 2020 to get the company to address the issue. Google never responded to the suggestion, allege attorneys. "Our girls ask how and why their daddy died, and I'm at a loss for words they can understand because, as an adult, I still can't understand how those responsible for the GPS directions and the bridge could have acted with so little regard for human life," Alicia Paxson, Phillip Paxson's wife, told the Associated Press. Phillip Paxson is not the first person whose death has been tied to GPS. In 2020, an 18-year-old Russian motorist froze to death after he and a friend were stranded in a vehicle for a week after following a Google Maps route through the country's notorious "road of bones". In 2019, a truck driver in Jakarta, Indonesia, drove off a cliff after following a Google Maps route that was only meant for motorcycles, the Straits Times reported. In 2015, 51-year-old Zohra Hussain died in a fiery car accident in Indiana after her husband, who was following his Nissan Sentra's built-in GPS, drove off an unmarked toll road that led to a demolished bridge. Her husband, Iftikhar Hussain, sued the state of Indiana over the lack of barricades, according to the Chicago Tribune. • This article was amended on 21 September 2023 because an earlier version incorrectly referred to Serbia's "road of bones". It is in Russia.