



NEWS RELEASE

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Adams County Commander Convicted of Careless Driving Causing Death in Bennett Crash

John Paul Bitterman, a commander with the Adams County Sheriff's Office, was convicted Wednesday of careless driving resulting in death and injury in a crash near Bennett last March.

Bitterman (DOB 07/05/75) was on duty in an unmarked patrol vehicle and headed westbound on East 88th Avenue on March 28, 2019, when he ran a stop sign and collided with a Nissan Murano at the intersection of Colorado Highway 79, about seven miles north of Bennett.

Eira Saenz Sandoval, 85, was killed in the crash. Maria Del Refugio Corral Saenz, 58, the driver of the Nissan Murano, sustained a fractured tibia and sternum.

Evidence in the two-day trial showed that Bitterman had not been dispatched or dispatched himself to a call before the crash and had not employed the vehicle's lights or siren. Evidence also showed that he was logging into his computer system while driving in the moments before the crash.

Deputy District Attorney Danielle Warly told the jury in closing arguments that data retrieved from the vehicle indicated that the defendant slowed to 29 miles per hour two seconds before the crash but was accelerating with the pedal to the floor at the time the vehicles collided. The speed limit for 88th Avenue at that location is 55 mph.

The Colorado State Patrol concluded that Bitterman likely was distracted when he failed to stop at a clearly posted stop sign at the intersection. The State Patrol investigation found that neither vehicle showed signs of slamming on the brakes prior to impact. Sun glare was not a factor for Bitterman but could have been for the vehicle driven by Saenz, the State Patrol said.

The Adams County jury convicted Bitterman as charged on counts of careless driving resulting in death and careless driving causing bodily injury. Both are traffic offenses. Sentencing is set for 9:30 a.m. on February 28 in Division 8 of Adams County Court.