



STATE OF MICHIGAN

GOVERNOR'S TRAFFIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Airbag defect investigation team to receive award from Governor's Traffic Safety Advisory Commission

The ARC Automotive Airbag Defect Investigation Team is being recognized by the Governor's Traffic Safety Advisory Commission (GTSAC) for the investigation of a traffic crash that led to an airbag recall from General Motors.

The three-member team will be honored during the Traffic Safety Awards Virtual Ceremony, via Microsoft Teams, at 10 a.m., Tuesday, May 24, 2022. The GTSAC recognizes organizations, programs and individuals for outstanding involvement in traffic safety.

Nominated for an Outstanding Traffic Safety Achievement Award, the team is commended for investigating a fatal crash, discovering details that led to an airbag recall, and findings that have the potential to save countless lives. The team members are Dep. Hans Tolkkinen, Houghton County Sheriff's Office; Spl/Sgt. Daniel Verlin, Michigan State Police (MSP) Eighth District Headquarters; and Tpr. Steven Wallenius, MSP Gladstone Post.

A fatal crash occurred in August 2021 in Houghton County involving a 2015 Chevrolet Traverse and a 1981 Corvette. Deputy Tolkkinen was the original crash reconstructionist assigned to the incident. During the investigation, he noted that the airbag of the Traverse was detached and in the far back area of the vehicle, along with part of the steering column. Deputy Tolkkinen contacted Spl/Sergeant Verlin of the MSP Traffic Crash Reconstruction Unit, who then requested Trooper Wallenius, an MSP At-Scene Crash Investigator, to remove the event data recorder from the vehicle to download the information.

The team discovered that the steering column appeared to have exploded from the inside and the damage was not consistent with damage from the crash. In addition, during the autopsy, pieces of the airbag inflator were found in the driver's neck.

"The investigation of this incident has the potential to save an unknown number of lives," said Lt. Lance R. Cook in nominating the team. "While the recall was for a limited number of vehicles, the industry and safety advocates are taking harder looks at other airbags to prevent similar deaths."

The GTSAC was formed in 2002 to serve as the state's forum for identifying key traffic safety challenges and developing and implementing plans to address those issues. The commission includes representatives from the MSP and the departments of Transportation, Education, State, and Health & Human Services, as well as the Office of the Governor, the Aging and Adult Services Agency, and the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning. There are also three representatives from local government appointed by the governor.

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• Gregg Brunner, Department of Transportation • Linda Scarpetta, Department of Health and Human Services • Maj. Ryan Pennell, Department of State
Police • Ashley Ellsworth, Health and Aging Services Agency
• William Miller, Local Representative • Chief Ronald Wiles, Local Representative • Sheriff Michael Poulin, Local Representative

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