

**Man Caught In Omaha After Bed Sheet Escape**

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha police say an Illinois fugitive suffered severe injuries when he used a bed sheet to escape from a third-floor apartment and landed hard. Police say Mario Welch is wanted for a home invasion robbery in Rock Island County, Ill. Police got a tip Thursday morning that he was at the apartment. When officers arrived, they found the sheet hanging out a window on the third floor. Welch dropped to the ground and managed to reach a nearby interstate, where he met a friend in a car and crawled in the trunk. Officers surrounded the car and took them into custody. Police say Welch shattered both ankles, fractured a leg, broke his back, and had a severe cut to his hand. He was to have surgery at an Omaha hospital.

**Deadline Looms For Disaster Aid Applications**

PIERRE (AP) — Flood victims in South Dakota have less than three weeks left to file claims for disaster aid. The Federal Emergency Management Agency says the last day to file for assistance is Oct. 24. That is also the final day to return applications for disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Kristi Turman with the South Dakota Office of Emergency Management says people whose home or business was near the flood-water or high water table should register for aid now because some flood-related damage like sinkholes and frost heave may not be visible until winter. She says people who wait until the damage is visible may miss the deadline and not be eligible for aid.

**Heineman Appoints New District Judge**

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Gov. Dave Heineman has appointed an attorney from North Platte as a district judge in central Nebraska. Heineman on Thursday named 58-year-old Richard Birch to the bench in the 11th Judicial District. Birch, who has practiced law for 32 years in Nebraska, replaces Judge John Murphy, who retired earlier this summer.

**Bus Crash In Neb. Injures Dozens**

BY JOSH FUNK  
Associated Press Writer

OMAHA, Neb. — Three passengers aboard a bus that crashed into an overturned semitrailer in Nebraska on Thursday say the driver may have been on the phone at the time of the collision that injured dozens — a claim investigators dispute.

Five people were hospitalized in Kearney, about 180 miles west of Omaha, after the crash around 2 a.m. Thursday involving two semitrailer trucks and a Denver-bound bus. But most of the 41 people who were taken to the hospital had only minor injuries.

The Nebraska State Patrol said after the first semitrailer overturned in the westbound lanes of Interstate 80 near Gibbon, a second semitrailer clipped it. Then the bus struck the overturned semitrailer.

"All of a sudden, you hear the driver say, 'Oh, my God.' Boom. It just disintegrated. Something you wouldn't expect to see in a lifetime," Jimmy Strickland said.

During the collision, Strickland said his six-month-old son slid underneath a seat in the back of the bus. Strickland said it was chaotic after that.

Strickland and fellow passengers, Anthony Pavarotti and Heather Howell, say the driver may have been on her cell phone. But Nebraska State Patrol spokeswoman Deb Collins said the initial investigation showed the cell phone was not in use when the accident happened.

Howell, who was traveling from Davenport,

Iowa, to Eugene, Ore., with her husband Joshua Marquez, said she saw the driver talking on the phone on the leg of the trip from Omaha to the crash site.

"She was swerving. I thought she was falling asleep but she was awake the whole time. She was on the phone the whole time from Omaha," Howell said. "Another 18-wheeler missed the trailer laying in the middle of the road. She wasn't paying attention."

American Bus Association spokesman Dan Ronan said the bus company prohibits personal cell phone calls, but the company's drivers use cell phones to communicate with dispatchers, other bus drivers and terminals along the route.

"There's no indication she was doing anything improper," Ronan said.

Collins said the first semitrailer overturned after the driver drifted into the median and overcorrected.

Collins said it wasn't immediately clear how long the first truck had been blocking the interstate before the second truck and bus hit it. The accident closed I-80 for about 4 1/2 hours. It reopened around 6:30 a.m.

Officials said the Burlington Trailways bus driver — 50-year-old Michelle Anderson, of Omaha — was in critical condition at the hospital Thursday afternoon. The driver of the first semi — 39-year-old Mohammed Arguini, of Antioch, Tenn. — was in fair condition.

One of the bus passengers — 77-year-old Barbara Bishop, of Hemet, Calif. — was in serious condition Thursday. Two other passengers were in fair condition; they are:

48-year-old Danny Briggs, of St. George, Utah; and 50-year-old Willie Abner, of Birmingham, Ala.

The 61-year-old driver of the second truck was not hurt.

Good Samaritan Hospital spokeswoman Marsha Wilkerson said 30 people were treated and released, and some refused treatment.

Pavarotti, 53, told the *Kearney Hub* that he was awake and sitting four rows behind the driver when the crash happened.

Pavarotti said the bus was in the left-hand lane being passed by the second semi on the right when it came upon the overturned semi, so he said the bus went right through the trailer full of dried cereal.

Pavarotti, who is homeless, said his 4-year-old service dog was killed in the crash.

"I'm having a hard time dealing with it. We've never been separated. Never been separated," he said to the *Kearney Hub*.

Thomas Laulunen, of Duluth, Minn., said he had his eyes closed when the bus plowed into the truck's trailer, and he went flying upon impact.

Passengers described jumping through windows with some assistance from people at the scene. Laulunen said he caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a wooden wall at the front of the bus that he later determined was from the trailer the bus crashed into.

"This bus cut the trailer right in half," Laulunen said, adding it took about 45 minutes for rescuers to cut the driver out of the wreckage.

**Harvest**

From Page 1A

lated on the machine. Rowher, who keeps a fire extinguisher, water and a shovel on his combine, managed to douse the embers before they could flame up.

"If I hadn't been looking and been in the right place at the right time it could have had a different result," Rowher said Thursday, as he was finishing up harvesting 500 acres of soybeans.

Earl Ziegler, a 62-year-old soybean farmer from southern Minnesota, said this year is the worst he's seen for fires. He knows of six fires in his county alone. He said all farmers can do to reduce the risk is to check their equipment closely.

"Every day I take an air compressor and blow all the dust off the machine and do a good inspection to make sure there aren't any parts rubbing or bearing goings out that could cause friction and create a spark," said Ziegler, who farms 500 acres of soybeans and 500 acres of corn near Good Thunder, Minn.

Michael Schommer, a spokesman for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, said officials are using social media tools such as Twitter to remind farmers to take precautions, including checking equipment and grabbing a fire extinguisher before heading into the fields.

Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey said his agency is putting out a similar message.

"The challenge with the wind and dry weather is it's hard to stop them once they start," Northey said.

Iowa state Climatologist Harry Hillaker said the dry conditions — while not nearly as severe as those in Texas — have left states in the northern Plains and Midwest with plenty to burn.

"One thing we have here is thousands of square miles of corn and soybeans and the vegetation is so dense that if a fire got started and if we get the high winds, things can spread very, very quickly," he said. "The fire danger is pretty severe."

**Iowa Student Cited For Having Weapons**

JESUP, Iowa (AP) — The Jesup School Board is considering expelling a student who authorities say brought weapons to the high school last week.

The Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier (<http://bit.ly/nhViaR>) says the student allegedly had a gun and a knife. He was cited for carrying weapons on school grounds.

Police Chief Rick Deitrick says the student didn't threaten anyone. Deitrick says the student was going practice shooting after school. The chief says a small handgun was found in his backpack.

Superintendent Nathan Marting says the principal received a tip on Friday, and the student admitted he had the weapons.

The case was referred to juvenile court services, and the student was suspended. The school board will review an expulsion request on Monday.



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