

Fair Weather Enforcement:

**BHP covers the
blacktop during a busy
holiday weekend**

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Starting at 5:00 on the evening of July 2nd, Girdwood, Alaska witnessed a swarm of cars, trucks and motorcycles. The normal flow of traffic became a bumper-to-bumper caravan as the annual 4th of July weekend celebration pilgrimage commenced. Its population swelled by thousands and the community actually bustled. To accommodate the flurry of activity the trooper presence nearly tripled. The Alaska Bureau of Highway Patrol's (BHP) Mat-Su team, determined to show a strong presence in hopes of curbing poor driving behaviors and diminishing the chances of a collision, even made the trek to Girdwood to keep an eye on drivers traveling the jammed highway.

"I couldn't even pull out in traffic to go after a speeder—it was unbelievable," said Officer Peter Steen. Steen is a Palmer Police Officer but now that he is a member of the BHP his jurisdiction extends to the border.

By Friday, the traffic was still heavy but you could actually see the black top between vehicles.

Usually Girdwood, Alaska is a small, relaxed town of approximately 2,200 laid back souls along the Seward Highway that epitomizes quaint, beautiful Alaska. The Alaska State Trooper Post just off the roadway houses a sergeant, three troopers and a wildlife trooper.

The cause of the metamorphous from

quaint to crazy is two-fold—the Girwood Forest Fair and the 4th of July celebration in Seward. Girdwood is a destination to outdoor enthusiasts and fairgoers in its own right, but the activities scheduled about a hundred miles south on the Kenai Peninsula is what causes the traffic to snarl during the holiday weekend.

Late Friday afternoon, Officer Steen headed to Johnson Pass looking for a motorcyclist that had evaded troopers further south. His dash radar and rear radar hummed each time it locked on to a vehicle. 69, 65, 72... the traffic moved. The radar jumped to a higher pitch as the number 80 flashed red on the display. A silver Integra with blacked out windows zoomed by. It



Officer Peter Steen writes up a citation for speeding after pulling over a motorist traveling on the Seward Highway.

gave no indication of slowing down as it continued south.

Steen activated the lights on his black unmarked Crown Victoria and waited to flip around. A little more than a mile away a dirt cloud hung in the air where a small gravel road connected to the highway. A man in a Silver pick up sitting at the junction waved his hand and pointed his thumb over his shoulder.

Steen pulled up and roll down his window. “Hey.”

“Silver Car with tinted windows?”

Steen nodded. “That’s the one.”

“Down that way. He almost slammed into me when he turned in.”

Sure enough, right around the bend the silver car was sitting on the side of the road. The driver claimed Steen had the wrong car— he wasn’t speeding, he just pulled off for a quick break. Steen didn’t buy it, he had his man and he knew it. The driver was ultimately cited for speeding and for his windows being tinted darker than



Officer Steen explains to a motorists how to take care of his speeding ticket and a citation for his windows being tinted beyond the allowable level. Steen located a speeder after they turned onto a gravel side street.

regulations allowed.

Shortly after the stop, Steen headed back toward Girdwood to patrol the Highway Safety Corridor. He didn’t get very far. Without even going a mile the radar hit the high octave again.

“Once they (motorists) get into the pass, they must think



A scenic pullout along the Seward Highway was the perfect location for a motorist to pull into after seeing a cruiser with its lights activated. The driver was ultimately cited for speeding. He was clocked going 80 mph in a 65 mph. It was a double fine ticket as he was speeding through a Highway Safety Corridor. The Seward Highway Safety Corridor is from mile marker 90 to 117. There are three other Highway Safety Corridors in Alaska.

they've passed all the troopers," said Steen after pulling over two pick-up trucks traveling together at 84 miles per hour down to Seward. "They pick up the pace once they get into the pass."

Three hours and eight traffic stops later, Steen finally made it back to Girdwood.

"It takes hours to go miles. It's almost like taking one step forward just to take a step back," said Steen. "I've been trying to get back (to Girdwood) the whole time."

Steen's shift was no different than the other troopers working traffic that day. It was a busy day with a lot of public contacts on the side of the highway. Speeders were common, but most motorists obeyed traffic laws.

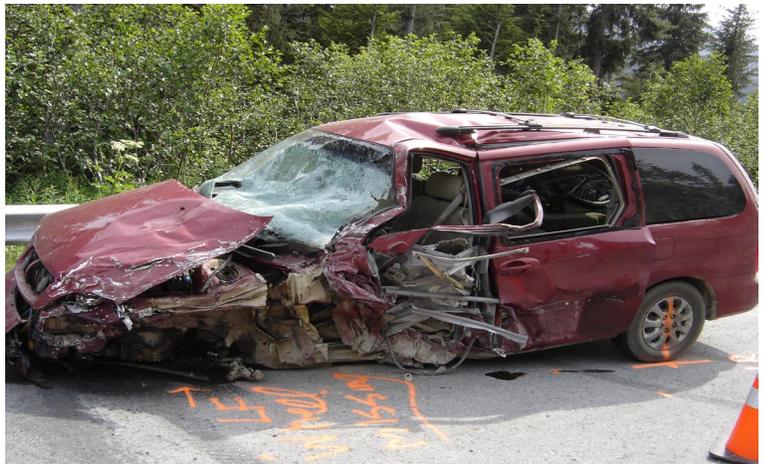
The next day, Steen and other members of BHP responded to mile 74.5 of the Seward Highway. A man had called 9-1-1 reporting he was just in a collision and people were hurt. It was the same general area that Steen spent the day prior patrolling.

Four cars were involved in the wreck. A vehicle pulled into the oncoming lane of traffic allegedly intending to pass cars traveling in front of her. Instead, she sideswiped one vehicle then slammed head on into the next vehicle in line. A tire flew off the van and struck the vehicle following behind that. One woman was killed and four people went to hospitals in Anchorage for treatment.

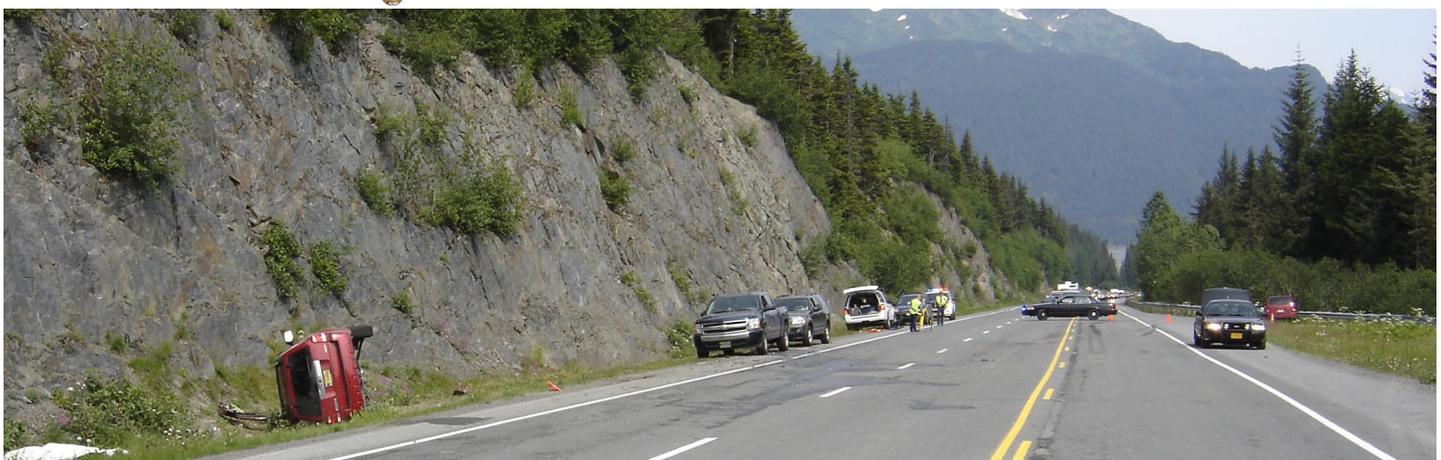
It was the last thing troopers wanted to see on the highway during the holiday. 🚔



A woman was killed after her red Ford Escape was hit head on by a van crossed the center line and attempted to pass two vehicles in front of it. A male passenger was transported with non life-threatening injuries.



The driver of the van was transported to a hospital in Anchorage for treatment of relatively minor injuries after she sideswiped one vehicle and hit a second head on at mile 74.5 of the Seward Highway. Two children in the vehicle were uninjured.



Mile 74.5 of the Seward Highway was blocked off for hours while the Bureau of Highway Patrol investigated a fatal collision. Troopers were able to direct traffic slowly around the wreckage.