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Explosion Prompts Concern About Police Cars

Crown Victorias Under Scrutiny

POSTED: 2:46 p.m. CDT May 18, 2003

DALLAS -- New concerns are emerging from a car accident involving a Dallas police officer.

A police cruiser burst into flames Saturday morning after being rear-ended on the westbound lanes of I-30 near the Hampton exit. NBC 5 News' Allison Smith reported on the concerns surrounding Ford Crown Victorias, which Dallas police officers drive.

Not much more than a steel, burned-out metal cage was left of the police car that exploded Saturday. The officer had just stepped out of the car to help a motorist in a stalled vehicle when police say a truck slammed into the back of his car, causing the explosion.

The driver of the truck was charged with DWI.

"Neither the officer or suspect received any injuries as a result of collision," said Cpl. Chris Gilliam of the Dallas Police Department.

In a similar accident seven months ago, Dallas police officer Patrick Metzler was killed when his Crown Victoria burst into flames after a drunk driver slammed it from behind.

"Basically, Ford is writing off police officers at high speeds, saying, 'Sorry, some of them are just gonna die, and there's nothing we can do about it,'" said city attorney Madeleine Johnson.

The city of Dallas filed a lawsuit against Ford Motor Company, claiming these cars are equipped with defective fuel tanks that explode on impact. All of the Dallas police cars were then equipped with a safety shield around the fuel tank. Police are investigating if the car that exploded Saturday had a safety shield.

One officer said that as much as he'd like to believe he's safe in a car with a fuel shield, any car that's hit by another going 80 mph could explode. But city attorneys said it's too big of a coincidence that more than a dozen officers have died in these rear-end collisions with Crown Victorias since 1983.

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