



K26 “That’s the Night That the Lights Went Out in Ventura” (A DUID Soma / Methamphetamine Case Study)

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After attending this presentation, the participant will receive insight into the events surrounding one of the most prominent “driving under the influence of drugs” cases adjudicated in Ventura County.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by illustrating the difficult challenges and decisions made by the toxicologists; investigators and prosecutors associated with drugged driving collision fatality cases. The detailed Case Study model format and its examination serve as a vehicle to share knowledge and promote discussion in this constantly evolving arena.

At 6:50 p.m. on August 12, 1998, the lights at the Telephone and Hill intersection near the Government Center in Ventura, California were inoperable. Each car was proceeding by treating it as a four-way stop, as is required by law. The first driver, a 28-year-old female senior Deputy, was preparing to turn left on Hill Street onto Telephone heading east. The second driver was in a pick-up truck on Telephone heading west traveling work at UPS. Traffic in the lanes was backed up as people were abiding by the inoperable signal. The second driver approached the intersection at a minimum speed of 56 miles per hour, made a late lane change into the right turn lane of Telephone road, and proceeded straight through the intersection crashing into the car being driven by the first driver. The impact was tremendous and the first driver probably died instantaneously. None of the law enforcement personnel noted any symptomologies. One even gave the opinion that the second driver was not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The second driver admitted only to having taken Claritan and Sudafed. She claimed Soma had been administered two days earlier. At 8:50 p.m. a urine sample was obtained and found to be positive for methamphetamine and Soma. At 9:10, blood was drawn from the second driver, which tested negative for the presence of alcohol but positive for methamphetamine, and Soma. The methamphetamine level was quantified to be at 0.12 milligrams per liter. The Soma level was quantified to be at 0.58 milligrams per liter.

The second driver had been a long-time methamphetamine user. In 1984, she possessed five pounds of methamphetamine to be delivered for sale and pled guilty in Federal Court on that case in 1988. She had tested positive for methamphetamine twice while on probation.

Six separate experts were consulted while preparing for trial in this case. Opinions varied on levels of impairment and the ability to prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt with these facts. The various opinions and their impact on the case will be discussed in the presentation of this case study.

Drugged Driving, Driving Impairment, Under the Influence