

TOW-TRUCK DRIVER GUILTY OF RECKLESS HOMICIDE

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

He might not have foreseen the deadly results, but a *tow-truck* driver trying to pull a loaded double tractor-trailer out of the mud should have known he didn't have the right equipment, a judge said yesterday.

That error in judgment led to the death of 22-year-old Danielle Knapp, who was killed by a block-pulley that flew off the Xtreme Towing truck under the strain of the 32-ton load.

As Knapp was driving on I-270 near Rt. 62 on Jan. 13, 2005, the 20-pound pulley crashed through the windshield of her car, killing her instantly.

For his "perverse disregard for a known risk," Judge Michael J. Holbrook ruled that William Peck, 36, was guilty of reckless homicide, a felony punishable by up to five years in prison.

Holbrook will sentence Peck, of the 4200 block of Karl Road, on April 24. He allowed Peck to remain free on bond.

"I'm sorry, but it's basic mathematics," Holbrook said in handing down his verdict in Franklin County Common Pleas Court. "We are dealing with high-tension, high-impact items. His training was also inadequate."

On hearing the verdict, Knapp's parents, James and Laronda Knapp, of Marion, embraced in tears. They later declined to comment, as did Peck.

The Knapps have filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against Peck, the now-closed towing company and the manufacturer of the pulley, known as a snatch block.

Peck's attorney waived a jury trial. Holbrook heard three days of testimony about the accident.

The owners of two other towing companies testified that they would have hauled out the trapped CCX double-trailer semi a different way.

Assistant County Prosecutor Keith McGrath argued that Peck should have known that a snatch block rated to handle 3 tons couldn't pull out a 32-ton dead weight.

"The fact that the equipment failed shouldn't be a surprise," he said.

Defense attorney Robert Krapenc said he would appeal the verdict. He likened Peck's actions to that of someone who picks up a gun without checking to see whether it's loaded.

"This was unforeseen," Krapenc said. "Is it likely? No. And if it is not likely, it is not reckless."

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Illustration: Photo appeared in newspaper, not in the archive.

Photo caption: William Peck will be sentenced April 24 and faces up to five years in prison for causing the death of Danielle Knapp.