

The Washington Post

9 suspected illegal immigrants die in Texas van wreck; 8 survivors in custody, others at large

By Associated Press, Published: April 11

McALLEN, Texas — A van overstuffed with suspected illegal immigrants rolled and crashed after fleeing a traffic stop in a South Texas border city, leaving at least nine Mexican citizens dead and injuring six others, officials said Wednesday.

Immigration authorities have eight survivors of the wreck in custody, according to Enrique Mendiola, acting assistant chief for the Border Patrol's Rio Grande Valley sector. He said no one has been charged and an investigation is ongoing.

Border Patrol agents stopped the van in Palmview, 10 miles west of McAllen, on Tuesday night. Some of the passengers immediately sprinted away and agents pursued them on foot, catching one, Mendiola said.

But as the foot chase unfolded, the van sped off.

The agents came across the wreck three or four blocks away on U.S. 83. The scene was strewn with backpacks and water bottles and nine bodies lay scattered nearby, he said.

The van was demolished, but several managed to flee the wreck, Palmview police Cmdr. Lenny Sanchez said. The vehicle had been gutted to accommodate far more than the eight people it was designed to carry, he said.

Six people were taken to a hospital and three of them were later released to authorities, Sanchez said. All of them are in the custody of Border Patrol, he said. One of the men who fled subsequently turned himself in: Palmview police handed him over to immigration authorities, Sanchez said.

It wasn't clear how many people from the van remained on the loose.

Mendiola said most of those involved in the crash were from Mexico. Sanchez said all those who died were Mexican citizens, but he declined to provide the nationalities of those who survived. He said authorities believed they entered the country illegally.

Many of the dead came from the southern state of Oaxaca, one of the poorest regions of Mexico, according to Ricardo Alday, spokesman for the Mexican Embassy in Washington. Consular officials were interviewing survivors and gathering information on the dead to assist their families with repatriation of the bodies.

A 23-year-old woman who lives nearby told the McAllen Monitor that she didn't see the accident happen but that several victims seemed to be alive in the immediate aftermath.

"The bodies were everywhere," Diana Castillo said. "It's really sad because they came over here to live a better life and then they lost their lives."

Anna Garza, a 56-year-old woman who also lives near the scene of the crash said "lots of helicopters came really quickly, I think to take the wounded to the hospital."

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-say-at-least-9-suspected-illegal-immigrants-killed-6-hurt-in-south-texas-van-rollover/2012/04/11/gIQA1A8DAT_story.html