

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

CRIMINAL DIVISION

82 Ionia Ave N.W.
Suite 450
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-3022
Telephone: (616) 632-6710
Fax: (616) 632-6714



CHRISTOPHER BECKER
Prosecutor

MONICA M. JANISKEE
Chief Assistant Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE RE: DEATH JOHN WIECHENTHAL

On December 21st, 2017 Kentwood Police were dispatched to an accident in the area of 52nd Street and Kalamazoo Avenue. When they arrived they found a Ford F-150 had struck the rear of a Chevy Impala. The engine compartment of the Ford F-150 was lodged in the backseat area of the Chevy Impala. The driver of the Chevy was John Wiechenthal. He was non-responsive at the scene and later pronounced dead at the hospital. The driver of the F-150 was Mark Hokzema and he was conscious, but was unable to provide any information as to what occurred. When police asked him his name at the scene he replied, "Blodgett". He was asked a number of other questions, but according to the police report his answers to the questions were "incomprehensible" before they took him away in the ambulance.

Those who witnessed the accident told police that the F-150 was driving southbound on Kalamazoo Avenue at a high rate of speed, some estimated he was traveling between 70-80 miles an hour. The truck was driving erratically; it passed a number of vehicles, came close to hitting a curb, in addition to traveling at a high speed. The F-150 attempted to pass the Impala while they were both traveling southbound on Kalamazoo. The Impala was in the right lane, started to change into the left lane, it then appeared the Impala noticed the truck was passing in the left lane so stopped the lane change. The F-150 reacted to the Impala beginning to change lanes, went into the left lane where it rear-ended the Impala. The impact caused both vehicles to veer off the roadway; both vehicles went through a utility pole, continuing through yards while connected, until they finally stopped partially in a yard and partially on Kalamazoo Avenue.

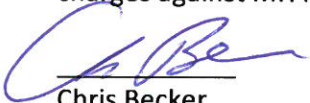
John Wiechenthal died due to multiple blunt force trauma to the chest from the collision. Mark Hokzema was transported to the hospital with serious but non-life threatening injuries. A blood test was done on Mr. Hokzema at the hospital, he did not have any alcohol or drugs in his system. While at the hospital Mr. Hokzema was able to speak with police, but from his statement the last memory he had was turning onto 44th Street on his way to go to Meijer. He had no memory after that. It was at that time police found out that Mark Hokzema had surgery for a brain tumor on November 27, 2017.

There was risk of seizure associated with the brain surgery Mr. Hokzema underwent on November 27. Police obtained a copy of the discharge instructions where he was restricted to walking and sedentary type activities for 4 weeks, but most importantly for this incident, he was **not** prevented from driving. His discharge papers stated, "There is the possibility of seizure or other problems occurring. Even if on medication to prevent seizure there is a remote possibility that they may still occur." In fact he was told it **was** permissible for him to drive once he was off the medication and he no longer had any "visual disturbances". This is apparently normal protocol to only restrict the driving for a few days while on the medication, and not for weeks after surgery. Mr. Hokzema was given 5 days of medication, never received a re-fill, and no medications were found in his system the day of the accident when a blood test was done. This accident occurred almost 3 weeks after his surgery. He was well past the 5 days he would have been on the medication and restricted from driving. He had driven prior to December 21st

with no issues. He had no restrictions against operating a motor vehicle on the day the accident happened.

From the evidence gathered it would appear Mr. Hokzema had some sort of medical event while driving on December 21st. He has no memory of driving after turning on to 44th Street. According to the police he was "incomprehensible" when they first made contact. From the CDR downloads of the Ford F-150 Mr. Hokzema never applied the brake before the crash, in fact he was accelerating. At five seconds before the crash his speed was 87 miles an hour, at .05 of a second before the crash he was at 98 miles an hour, and at impact the truck was going 99 miles an hour with no application of the brake and 100% application of the accelerator pedal. Mr. Hokzema has a spotless driving record; he has no tickets, no evidence of bad driving at all in his past, there is no reason for him to be driving in this way. Given the fact the accelerator pedal to his truck was 100% deployed with no brake application it would appear he had a seizure while driving.

Since this was a medical event, there is no criminal liability. He was not prevented from driving, he had no restrictions on operating a vehicle. This is a horrible accident, and a tragedy for the family of Mr. Wiechenthal. It is however just that, a horrible accident, and therefore there is no basis to file criminal charges against Mr. Hokzema.



Chris Becker

Kent County Prosecuting Attorney