

Cyclists' Deaths Point to PCH Perils (14/09/2005)

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The breathtaking views on the Pacific Coast Highway carry risks for cyclists, who ride in the sea breeze at considerable peril as cars on the narrow road zoom by.

On Saturday morning, a catering truck hit two cyclists, who had been forced off the northbound shoulder and onto the road by a construction project. The driver did not stop immediately after hitting the men, who died soon after being airlifted to [UCLA](#) Medical Center.

It was the first fatal bicycle accident in at least five years on this stretch of PCH, said Philip Brooks, traffic sergeant for the Malibu-Lost Hills Station of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The collision, which occurred about 10 a.m., killed **Stanislav Ionov**, 46, of Calabasas, an accomplished physicist at HRL Laboratories in Malibu; and Scott Bleifer, 41, of Santa Monica, a vice president at Union Bank of California. The two avid cyclists do not appear to have known each other.

On Tuesday, Victor Silva, 27, of Compton was charged with two counts of felony vehicular manslaughter and two counts of felony hit-and-run in their deaths. Silva apparently has no prior record.

In an interview just after the accident, Silva said he hadn't seen the men before the accident. After hitting them, he said, he couldn't stop for fear of injuring a person cooking in the back of his truck, said Sheriff's Det. John Caffrey. Cooking in the back of a moving vehicle is illegal, Caffrey said. Authorities believe Silva was traveling around the 50 mph speed limit.

Witnesses said the impact flung the two cyclists 150 feet forward.

Both Bleifer and Ionov were wearing helmets. They appear to have been riding in the bike lane until orange traffic cones forced them into the right-hand lane. The cones signaled the start of a construction project for a synagogue at the Malibu Jewish Center. For the length of the construction site, concrete barriers cut off the shoulder.

The men were riding side by side when they were hit, and it's possible that one was passing the other, which is legal, Caffrey said. Riding side by side in other circumstances "is highly not recommended," he said.

So far in 2005, eight cyclists have been injured on PCH, according to the Sheriff's Department. Seven were injured in 2004 and six in 2003.

Bleifer had been training for the Arthritis Foundation's Amgen California Coast Classic, an eight-day, 500-mile charity ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles, which starts Sept. 24. Now his friends and other members of his cycling club, the Velo Club La Grange of Westwood, plan to join the last leg of the Classic, riding in his honor from Ventura to Los Angeles on Oct. 1.

Friend and fellow club member Bruce Mitchell said Bleifer was "very engaging, very smart, had very good ideas." The two often attended spinning classes together at the Spectrum Club, but they didn't cycle together, he said. Mitchell said he prefers the club's regular group rides, which take place earlier in the morning, before the traffic picks up. Bleifer, he said, would head out later in the morning on his own.

Nearly every morning before riding, Mitchell and Bleifer would meet at Peet's Coffee & Tea in Santa Monica. Bleifer arrived every morning with Kona, his 6-year-old chocolate Labrador, Mitchell said, adding, "He made a whole army full of friends up at Peet's Coffee."

Bleifer's sister, Karen, of Century City said she'd received hundreds of e-mails from her brother's friends, many asking about Kona.

"Kona was the love of his life," she said. "Everybody wants Kona. I say, 'Oh, I'm sorry, you're going to have to wrestle my parents for Kona because she's all they have left of Scott.' "

Karen Bleifer, a jewelry designer, said her brother was very happy and an adventurer who took cycling trips in Tuscany and Hawaii, traveled by himself to Vietnam and hiked to the top of Machu Picchu, the ancient Incan city in Peru. Bleifer grew up in Beverly Hills, where he attended Beverly Hills High School. He earned a bachelor's degree at UC San Diego and a master's in business administration from USC, his sister said.

Ionov, who was born in Russia, had worked at HRL Laboratories since 1994.

Employees found out about his death in a message from the lab's president and vice president Monday, said spokesman David Weeks.

An accompanying bio said Ionov had studied physics at Moscow Physical Technical Institute, where he worked as a research assistant to Pyotr Leonidovich Kapitsa, a Nobel laureate. He received a bachelor's and master's degree and his doctorate from the Institute of Spectroscopy in the Soviet Union and became the director of an experimental group at the Research Center for Technological Lasers at the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In 1980, he emigrated to the United States, where he did postdoctoral work at UCLA and USC. He became an American citizen in 1999, and had a wife, Irina, and a daughter, Sophi, the bio said.

Ionov often rode his bike to work and went on long rides with co-workers. He also ran in numerous marathons.

Weeks said Ionov had a previous close call on his bike, riding with friends in Westlake Village. They were taking a break, standing and sitting with their bikes on the sidewalk, when a car lurched toward them. One of the riders was killed, Weeks said.

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