



## SPECIAL EDITION - Crash on I-4

*February 2008*

As you know, the Polk County Sheriff's Office was one of the first agencies on scene at the devastating crash that occurred on Interstate 4 in the predawn hours of Thursday, January 9, 2008.

The crash is still under investigation by the Florida Highway Patrol, and it may be some time before the final report is complete. However, there are a few things that quickly came to mind while I observed first responders at the scene.

The combination of conditions that morning, smoke and fog, appears to have been a major factor. And yet, seeing the debris field first hand, I cannot dismiss the fact that speed also contributed.

I encourage all motorists to check road and weather conditions prior to travel. Use low beams during foggy conditions and reduce your speed. The greater the speed you travel the less time you have to react to sudden changes in driving conditions.

Always drive defensively, never assume another driver is paying attention. Obey posted speeds and watch for caution indicators such as signs for construction or detours.

And most importantly, focus on what you're doing. Operating a motor vehicle is a very important responsibility. One lapse in attention could cost you your life, the life of a loved one, or the life of someone else.

The 70-car pileup was one of the worst crashes I have ever seen. My thoughts and prayers continue to go out to the victims and their families.

Please drive safely,  
*Grady Judd, Sheriff*



**Our Response**



At about 5:00 a.m. on Wednesday, January 9, 2008, just before shift change, the PCSO Communications Center advised deputies on the Southeast (SE) District channel that there was a traffic crash on I-4 westbound at exit 44, which is west of US Hwy 27.

County 911 had received calls about the crashes as well and notified the Florida Highway Patrol.

PCSO SE units begin to respond to work the crash. FHP troopers also responded from the area of I-4 and 27.

What started out as us providing traffic assistance for FHP ended up being our engagement in one of the most horrific crashes this county has ever seen.

From the dispatchers in the Comm. Center, to the responding patrol units from all over the county, to the supervisors setting up a command post and coordinating the shutting down of roadways and getting help to the deputies and other first responders, the agency pulled together and assisted FHP and others with handling this multi-vehicle crash.

The following link will take you to a timeline of events reconstructed from the dispatch and radio communications from 5:00 a.m. to 6:15 a.m. on that morning.

[Click here to read the transcript of calls](#)

## First Responders Got Support

Numerous agencies responded to the crash scene offering their expertise and support.

Community support was obvious with food delivered to first responders at the site and at the command center.

**Those agencies that responded to the scene were:**

### **Polk County Board of County Commissioners**

*Public Safety  
Emergency Management  
Emergency Medical Services  
Fire Services  
Fleet Management  
Communications  
Transit Services*



**Polk County School Board**

**State of Florida**

*Highway Patrol  
Department of Transportation  
Fire Marshal's Office  
Division of Forestry  
Health and Human Resources  
Fish & Wildlife Conservation Committee  
Division of Emergency Management  
Medical Examiner's Office*

**City of Auburndale**

*Fire Department  
Police Department*

**City of Bartow**

*Fire Department*

**City of Davenport**

*Fire Department*

**City of Lake Wales**

*Fire Department*

**City of Lake Alfred**

*Fire Department  
Police Department*

**City of Haines City**

*Fire Department  
Police Department*

**City of Lakeland**

*Fire Department*

**City of Winter Haven**

*Fire Department*

**Hillsborough County**

*Fire Department*

**Orange County**

*Fire Department*

**Lake County**

*Lake / Sumter EMS  
Fire Department  
Sheriff's Office*

**Osceola County**

*Fire Department*

**Red Cross**

*Provided Food and Drinks for First Responders*

**Salvation Army**

*Provided Food and Drinks for First Responders*

**Hospitals**

*Celebration Hospital  
Lakeland Regional Medical Center  
Orlando Regional Medical Center  
South Lake Hospital  
Tampa General Hospital  
Winter Haven Hospital  
Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center*

**Restaurants**

*(Provided food, water or energy drinks for first responders)*

*Abuelos, 3700 Lakeside Village Boulevard, Lakeland  
Shells Restaurant, 1551 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW, Winter Haven  
Texas Cattle Company, 735 E Main Street, Lakeland  
Anheuser Busch, Lakeland, 3907 Aero PL, Lakeland  
Atlanta Bread Company, 787 SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Winter Haven*

**Citizens**

*Paula Simmons and son, Jarrod Simmons, Winter Haven (provided water for first responders)  
Carol Schroeder and Debbie Barton, (provided ice and drinks for first responders)*



Aerial Images - Special Thanks to PCSO Pilot Greg Love







## What Others Are Saying...

I've had time to listen to the first 45 of these 92 radio transmissions. I have to say they make your agency look good. Some observers have complained that I-4 was not shut down quickly enough, but the transmissions make it clear that this was obviously a priority. We have deputies, dispatchers and supervisors talking in a direct, businesslike, matter-of-fact way about shutting down the highway and blocking access to it.

***Reporter, name withheld, Major News Media Organization***

Dear Sheriff,  
As a retired NYC Police Officer, living in Sebastian, Fl.

I feel a kinship with you and am proud of the great job you, and your dept are doing. I'm especially proud of you in your handling of the new conference I viewed on Eyewitness New, Jan 10.

The statement you made said it all " When Things Are At It's Worst, We Have To Be At Our Best."

God Bless You All. Have a safe tour.  
*Arnold Ring*

Dear Sheriff Grady Judd,

I just want to take the time to say hello and to say that I love how the sheriff's department works out in the community. Members handle themselves with the up-most respect. I am a school teacher and I want to become a deputy sheriff because I just love helping people and doing the right thing. I just want to say keep up the good work in our community.

Talk to you soon. Have a Merry Christmas, You and the PCSO family.  
*Jamie Phillips*



D/S Carlton Turner's Patrol Car

**Please extend my personal thanks to the deputies, fire fighters and related emergency personnel who responded to the accident on I-4 last week. Those of us who stopped immediately behind the mayhem had no idea what was ahead of us, noting that we were quickly engulfed in smoke/fog. Nonetheless, we were safe. As emergency workers began to arrive on the scene, including your deputies who I saw to be first on scene, I couldn't help but be impressed with how each checked on our well-being as they moved forward to survey the real "challenges" ahead of us.**

**It was a terrible day, but the professionalism exhibited by the emergency workers, including those first deputies to arrive, cannot go unnoticed. Please ask the Sheriff to thank them for me.**

***Roger D. Anderson***  
***Seafood Partners, Inc.***

My husband and I would like to extend thanks to one of Polk County's Finest for his actions during today's horrendous crash on I-4. We live in Davenport and use the interstate regularly. It is a relief to know that if one of my family members had been in that crash that Carlton [Turner] or any of Sheriff Grady Judd's officers would have acted in the same manner.

We hope that Officer Turner is resting well and that he will soon be feeling better. The bravery and courage he extended to the citizens hasn't gone un-noticed. Please get better soon!

Thank you is such a small thing but it's sent with well wishes and gratitude!

*Cheryl and Gary Dippel*

**May all your Deputies and Staff know how much they are appreciated today. Please pass along the thoughts of prayers, and concern for their well being. Not only for the physical aspect of what they are going through, but for the emotional and mental anguish they must feel. May God keep a hand on their shoulder, and a prayer in their heart...**

***Michell Le Mond***

I wanted to put out a public Thank you to a Polk County Sheriff's Deputy.

A couple weeks ago, 3 days after Christmas, my son's brand new bicycle was stolen off of our front porch. My son was extremely upset, and when Deputy Jack (Carlton) Turner arrived, I never expected what would happen next. After taking the report and leaving, Deputy Turner came back and had a bicycle with him.

He had one that he had kept in storage and wanted my son to have it. I was floored by his compassion. I will never forget the look on my 7 year old son's face that day as he realized the policeman 'Hero' had brought him a new bike to replace the one that was stolen. Just a few short weeks later, Deputy Turner would be the 1st on the scene of the tragic I-4 disaster.

The compassion this man has for helping people...whether it be making a little boy smile again or saving as many car accident victims as he could is unsurpassed. I just wanted to give a public Thank You to this wonderful young man.

I don't know if this could be printed up, but if it could that would be wonderful. I just would love for more people to see how wonderful this young deputy is.

Thanks!  
*Tori Wilkinson*  
*Auburndale, FL*

## **Media Coverage**

From the first phone call the PCSO Public Information Officers (PIO's) got at 5:45 a.m., "Hi this is ABC Action News, we're hearing that I-4 is shut down because of a huge wreck, is that true?" to the last official news release sent out on

January 14, 2008 (with photos of D/S Turner's smashed up patrol car), the PIO's worked around the clock to respond to the non-stop 24/7 media inquiries in reference to the crash on I-4 and to get the word out to the public.

Several news conferences were held each day at the Mobile Command Center; we talked to a number national news crews and set up a CBS Early Morning crew to interview the Sheriff; the Ag. deputies (see truck below) were very helpful in accomodating pool camera trips down to the crash site many times; and we sent out too many news releases to even count, telling the public each day which roads were shut down, how Deputy Turner was doing, and what our agency objectives were each day.



Odds are, when you woke up the morning of January 9th and heard I-4 was shut down, that information came from PCSO sending it out to the media, who also quickly responded to the scene, and camped out there for 2 solid days. We appreciate the news media's professionalism and hard work as they brought news of this event to the public.



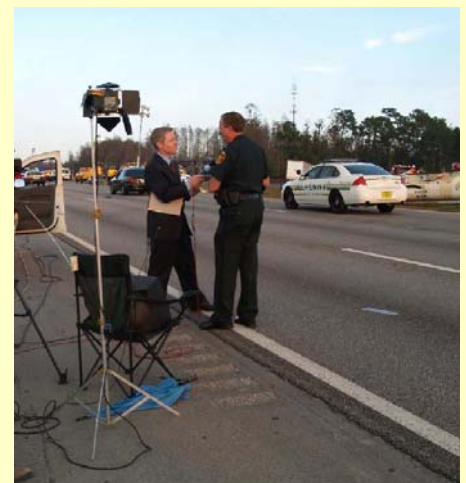
We also held a special news conference in Bartow, giving the media a great opportunity to hear Deputy Carlton Turner and Deputy Paul Buoniconti talk about their harrowing experiences.

If you saw footage of the crash site, and the road paving efforts, it was thanks to these hard-working PCSO Agricultural deputies, who utilized their trucks to haul, and ensure the safety of, groups of reporters and cameras down to the scene many times each day.



We like to call this photos "Reporters in the Mist." It was taken the morning of Thursday, January 10th.

Local news anchors came out to the scene - this was an important story for both the Tampa and Orlando news markets.



Here are Reginald Roundtree, and Keith Cate, talking to Sheriff Judd.