



Passenger in deadly Montana bus crash files suit



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A passenger in a western Montana bus crash that left two people dead and 32 injured filed a lawsuit Tuesday in state court accusing Rimrock Stages, Inc. and Greyhound Lines, Inc. of negligence.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of 77-year-old Claude Oulman of Butte, who remains hospitalized following the Jan. 8 crash along an icy stretch of Interstate 90 near Clinton.

An initial investigation by Montana Highway Patrol estimated the bus was traveling at 65 to 70 miles an hour when it slipped off the highway and rolled onto its side.

The lawsuit — filed Tuesday in state district court in Yellowstone County — alleges the driver was rushing to stay on schedule and reach his next destination in Missoula.

"He was pressured to stay on schedule, and that's the reason he was driving 65-miles an hour on a skating rink," said Christopher Edwards, one of Oulman's attorneys.

The speed limit where the crash took place is 75 mph, but Montana law requires motorists to travel at a speed that is safe for the conditions. There were multiple other crashes Jan. 8 along the same stretch of interstate, including a tractor-trailer rollover.

Edwards said his client suffered severe injuries including numerous broken bones and was in a coma following the crash. The lawsuit also names Oulman's wife, Callie, as a plaintiff. She was not a passenger.

Rimrock took over the Billings-to-Missoula route from Cincinnati-based Greyhound last year. The lawsuit calls Rimrock a Greyhound contractor.

Rimrock Stages vice president and minority owner Eric Forseth said he had not yet seen the lawsuit. He said the investigation into the accident was pending and that he was not aware of any citations or charges being issued against the company or the driver.

"We're taking care of all the bills and we're taking care of all the passengers personal effects and replacing everything that's broken," Forseth said.

Forseth added that Rimrock is not a direct contractor for Greyhound, although the companies

share ticketing services.

A spokeswoman for Greyhound did not immediately return a call from The Associated Press seeking comment.

The bus was headed west from Billings to Missoula at the time the crash, which occurred about 18 miles southeast of Missoula shortly after 7 a.m.

Those suffering the worst injuries appeared to have been ejected when the bus slid on its side and bounced, breaking out the windows on the driver's side. Three people were pinned under the bus and authorities said the driver was among those seriously injured.

A representative of the American Bus Association speaking on behalf of Rimrock Stages said after the accident that the bus was operated by a veteran driver who joined the company last spring.



[Top of Page](#) [Home](#) [Full Site](#)

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