

10th Victim Dies in Truck Trafficking Tragedy

A truck driver was due in federal court on Monday, accused in a suspected human smuggling operation in which 10 people died and dozens more were hospitalized in Texas after being trapped inside a tractor-trailer in sweltering heat.

James Mathew Bradley Jr., 60, was arrested on Sunday after authorities found eight men dead in the back of his truck parked outside a Walmart supermarket in San Antonio. Two more victims died later at hospitals, officials said.

Another thirty people, many in critical condition suffering from heat stroke and exhaustion, were rescued from the truck, which lacked air conditioning and drinking water, San Antonio Fire Chief Charles Hood said.

Outside temperatures topped 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 Celsius) on Sunday. San Antonio Police Chief William McManus said the people in the truck, whose nationalities were not immediately known, ranged from school-age children to adults in their 30s.

"All were victims of ruthless human smugglers indifferent to the well-being of their fragile cargo," Richard Durbin Jr., U.S. attorney for the Western District of Texas, said in a statement. "These people were helpless in the hands of their transporters. Imagine their suffering, trapped in a stifling trailer."

It was not immediately known what charges the driver would face. Bradley, from Clearwater, Florida, was due to appear in court in San Antonio at 11 a.m. local time on Monday, the U.S. attorney's office said.

San Antonio is about 150 miles (240 km) north of the border.

Eight bodies were initially discovered after officials were led to the tractor-trailer by a man who asked a Walmart employee for water.

Other suspects fled the scene as police arrived on Sunday, McManus said.

Mexico's government has asked the authorities for an exhaustive investigation, adding that its consul general in San Antonio was working to identify the victims' nationalities.

Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick expressed sympathy for the victims' families.

"I have been saying for years no one should have to die to come to America," Patrick, a Republican, said. "We need a secure border and legal immigration reform so we control who enters our country and they can come here in dignity."

U.S. President Donald Trump, a Republican, has vowed to crack down on immigrants living in the country illegally. In Texas alone, federal immigration agents arrested 123 illegal immigrants with criminal records in an eight-day operation ending last week.

The San Antonio deaths come more than a decade after what is considered the worst immigrant smuggling case in U.S. history when 70 people were found in an 18-wheeler truck. Nineteen people died in the incident in Victoria, Texas, about 100 miles (160 km) southeast of San Antonio, in May 2003.

The U.S. Border Patrol has regularly reported finding suspected immigrants in trucks along the U.S. border with Mexico.

This month, 72 people from Latin America were found in a trailer in Laredo. In June, 44 people were found in the back of a vehicle in the same Texas city, which lies directly

across the Rio Grande from Mexico. {eoa}

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