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PRESS RELEASE

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Drunk Driver Faces Life Sentence for Cal Trans Worker Death

District Attorney Mike Ramsey announced today the drunk driver accused of running down and killing a Cal Trans worker in 2010 admitted his guilt in Superior Court this morning and will be sentenced to life imprisonment next month.

Russell Ned Hodge, 48, Corning, pled guilty to a charge of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and admitted two prior driving under the influence convictions. Judge James Reilley accepted the plea and set a sentencing date of 2/28/13.

The charges stem from a fatal collision which occurred on November 14, 2010, in which Hodge struck and killed Cal Trans worker Gary Smith as Smith manned a roadblock/detour on Highway 99 north of Chico at approximately 11:15 P.M. Smith had been called from his home to divert traffic around another fatal collision which occurred earlier that evening on Highway 99. The earlier collision was also caused by a drunk driver and three people had died.

Smith died shortly after being struck by the front passenger quarter panel of Hodge's Ford F-250 truck as Hodge drove his vehicle through the roadblock at approximately 60 MPH without slowing or stopping. Hodge had a blood alcohol level of .20 %.

Hodge had been charged with a count of second degree murder as an alternative to the gross vehicular manslaughter charge. Both carried a 15years to life sentence. As part of the negotiated plea, Hodge stipulated to a state prison sentence and agreed to waive all his custody credits. Under the terms of the plea, Hodge will be sentenced to 15 years to life and will not be eligible for parole any sooner than he would have been if convicted of 2nd degree murder.

Gary Smith's family and fellow Cal Trans workers were in court today as Hodge entered his plea. They expressed satisfaction with the guilty plea and will attend the hearing on 2/28/13 to address the court prior to sentencing.

District Attorney Ramsey said: "Four innocent lives were lost on Highway 99 that night. The two men responsible, both who knew better than to be driving while intoxicated because each had prior DUI convictions, will be serving life sentences. We sought the maximum sentences in each of these cases to demonstrate the madness has to stop. We cannot tolerate the carnage caused by drinking drivers, particularly those who have prior convictions."