



# BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Dump Truck Driver to Stand Trial for Deaths of Two People on Highway 99 & Neal Road Drowsy Driving Alleged**

After a preliminary hearing today, an Antioch man was held to answer on two counts of felony gross vehicular manslaughter by Butte County Superior Court Judge Michael Candela. The charges were the result of a four-vehicle collision occurring June 21, 2019 that left two people dead and four others seriously injured.

Thomas Fairhurst, 57, of Antioch, was driving a 26,000-pound 2011 Volvo dump truck north bound on Highway 99, as he approached the red light at Neal Road. Fairhurst was driving at 55 mph when he collided into the rear of a Chevrolet Aveo that was stopped at the red light. There was no evidence of braking by Fairhurst before the impact. Fairhurst's dump truck, which struck the Chevrolet from behind, pushed the Chevrolet into a Toyota Sienna that had also been stopped at the red light. The Toyota was then, in turn, pushed into and under a semi-truck that had also been stopped in front of the Toyota. Both the Chevrolet and Toyota sustained extensive damage.

Donald Shippen, 53, of Chico, and his wife, Apryl Shippen, 56, both passengers of the Chevrolet, were pronounced deceased at the scene as a result of the collision. Their adult son, the driver of the Chevrolet, sustained major injuries and was transported to Enloe Hospital.

All three occupants of the Toyota also suffered major injuries and were transported to Enloe Hospital. Fairhurst and the semi-truck driver were not injured.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said testimony from CHP investigators at today's preliminary hearing established Fairhurst had engaged in late night partying and activities in the days leading up to the collision. The investigators testified this precluded Fairhurst from obtaining the sleep needed to operate his commercial vehicle in a safe and attentive manner. Of note, a CHP investigator testified Fairhurst was fatigued to such a degree that it was believed Fairhurst was oblivious to the stopped traffic ahead of him.

Fairhurst will next appear in Butte County Superior Court on September 8, 2021, when a jury trial date will be set. He remains out of custody on his own recognizance. He faces up to 19 years in state prison on the charges alleged.