

Nevada analyzing runaway truck ramps

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

No one yet knows what course of events forced Eric Holton to steer his speeding truck onto a gravel escape ramp on the Mount Rose Highway on Monday.

What is clear is that things had already gone terribly wrong. It's the last thing any trucker wants to do.

"You talk to most truck drivers and they tell you they are going to do anything possible to avoid using one of those ramps," said Thor Dyson, district engineer for the Nevada Department of Transportation.

"They know bad things are going to happen," Dyson said. "They may or may not make it through it."

Holton didn't. While the runaway truck ramp near the junction of Nevada 28 apparently did its job – halting the big rig in a spray of dust and gravel – the truck's load of building material smashed forward into the driver's cab, killing him instantly.

The Nevada Highway Patrol continues its investigation into Monday's accident that killed the 31-year-old Gardnerville resident, including what forced the driver to use the ramp in the first place.

But the accident focused new attention on the Mount Rose ramp – the site of a horrific fatal truck crash nearly two years ago – and on the state's three other ramps installed to give drivers a last option during a worst-case scenario.

The Nevada Department of Transportation is currently conducting a study into the state's four highway escape ramps,

an effort initiated in the wake of the June 2010 accident. Trucker Frederick Douglas Matthews died when his speeding lumber truck launched off the end of the ramp and smashed into an Incline Village home nearby, exploding into flames. Investigators later determined the truck had faulty brakes.

Read the whole story