

Truck Ban Considered For Etna's King Hill Road

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ETNA — An accident in which a dump truck hauling a backhoe surged off King Hill Road and slammed into the embankment of the Etna Library has prompted Police Chief Nick Giaccone to recommend limiting truck traffic on the road, which was the site of a fatal crash two years ago.

"The history of this hill speaks well for itself," Giaccone wrote in a July 15 memo to Interim Town Manager Jean Ulman only a few hours after the accident. "The time has come that we seriously consider forbidding thru trucking" on King Hill Road.

Such a ban would prohibit truckers from using

King Hill Road as a shortcut, but would not prevent commercial deliveries to homes on the road, Giaccone explained in a telephone interview Tuesday.

The July 15 accident injured no one, but it brought back memories of June 29, 1994, when a Massachusetts man was killed after losing control of his tractor-trailer while going down King Hill Road. Although the most recent accident ended without tragedy, if someone had been walking along King Hill Road or driving through the intersection at the foot of the hill or standing in front of the library, "they could have been killed quite easily," Giaccone said.

The paved portion of King Hill Road begins 1.3

miles above its intersection with Hanover Center Road. The grade of the road ranges from about 15 percent to 19 percent.

"It is a terribly steep hill," said Richard Hauger, Hanover's public works director. "We try to make sure our trucks only come down (the hill) empty."

Heavy vehicles descending the hill pick up a lot of speed, which can overwhelm brakes. "If the truck gets away from you, it's going to get away from you," Hauger said.

On the way down King Hill Road, drivers pass black-on-yellow signs warning of the steep grade and pointing out the curves. The board of select-

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men authorized the installation of these signs after the fatal accident in 1994. The posted speed limit is 30 mph.

The descent provides a nice view, but obliges the prudent driver to keep two hands on the wheel and one foot on the brake.

Coming around the last two curves, drivers see signs stating "narrow bridge" and "stop ahead." King Hill Road ends at a stop sign, with the steps leading up to the Etna Library directly across the road.

In the July 15 accident, "the truck and its trailer careened through the (Hanover Center Road) intersection with the driver trying to take last second evasive action," Giaccone wrote in his memo that day.

"Seeing the end of the road and the steps leading up to the library, he turned hard to his right hoping to ... (avoid) a head-on impact. In doing so the truck and its trailer tipped over and came to rest up against the embankment," he wrote.

Police said the driver told them he downshifted after seeing the signs warning of a steep grade. The police have determined the brakes were not faulty.

"The best we can come up with" is that the brakes overheated to a point where they were ineffective, Giaccone said.

Police estimate the truck was going about 34 mph when it reached the bottom.

"It is my opinion that the steepness of this hill, combined with the length of its descent, could cause well maintained and functioning equipment to fail," Giaccone wrote. Hauger agreed with that assessment, and said he would recommend keeping vehicles that weigh more than 10,000 pounds off King Hill Road, a Class V town road.

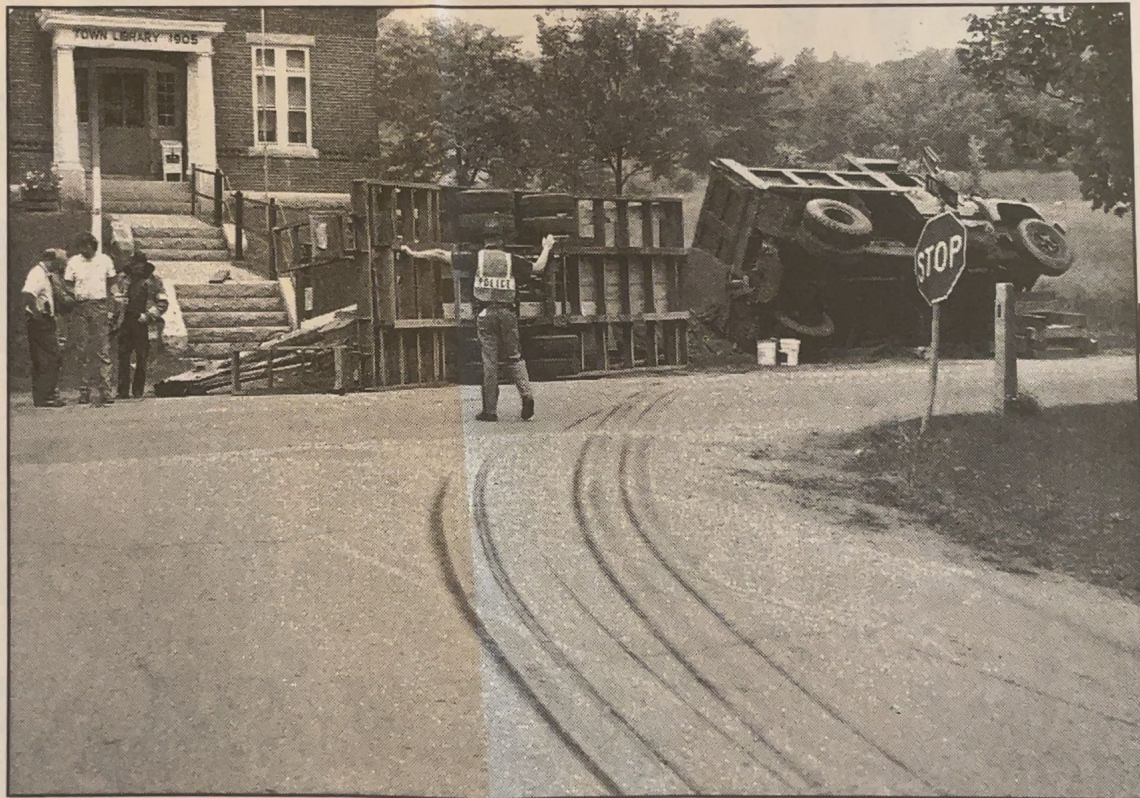


Photo courtesy of the Hanover Police Department

A truck pulling a trailer overturned by the Etna Library after coming down King Hill Road on July 15.

Those in the area who know the terrain voluntarily keep heavy equipment off the road, officials said.

John Gratiot, associate director of facilities operations and management at Dartmouth College, said the college does not send large trucks up or down King Hill Road.

"That road is not appropriate for big trucks," he said.

If Dartmouth needs to get a large truck to its Morton Farm — which is on Laramie Road off King Hill Road

— it goes the back way, from Ruddsboro Road or up Laramie Road, Gratiot said. "It's a little bit farther, but a whole lot safer," he said.

Sally Boillotat, director of riding at Morton Farm, said there is "no way I would take a load of horses down King Hill Road."

The board of selectmen is expected to discuss Giaccone's recommendation at its Aug. 5 meeting.

Minutes from a board meeting on Aug. 22, 1994, show that members

were asked then to ban "thru trucking," but "they feel this option would be hard to enforce."

Giaccone said he was researching how a ban could be implemented and enforced. Ulman, the interim town manager, said she is also compiling information so the board of selectmen can make an informed decision.

"The latest accident opens things up again and makes you think again about what could have happened," Ulman said.