

Prepared Written Testimony of Larry Celaschi
Councilman, Borough of Charleroi
Washington County, Pennsylvania

Before the United States House Sub Committee on the Judiciary
Hearing on the Impact of the Temporary Protective Status

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Larry Celaschi. I am a resident and elected Councilman of the Borough of Charleroi, Pennsylvania, a small former mill town of approximately 4,000 residents in Washington County.

I am not appearing before you as someone chasing talking points, an academic, or a policy consultant. I am here as a local elected official who has had to look residents in the eye and explain why their town no longer feels safe, stable, or familiar—and why decisions made far from Charleroi have imposed consequences our community never agreed to accept.

Charleroi did not volunteer to become a test case for federal immigration policy. We were not consulted, we were not asked about capacity, and we were not equipped for what was imposed upon us. Yet our borough has been repeatedly referenced in national media and political discussions as an example of how current immigration policy plays out in real American communities. I am here to explain what that has meant on the ground.

ABOUT CHARLEROI

Charleroi is less than one mile long from its first traffic light to its last. Under the Biden Administration's approach to immigration enforcement and refugee placement, our borough absorbed an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 migrants in a very short period of time. That represents a population increase of approximately 50 to 75 percent.

No community—large or small—can absorb that level of growth overnight without serious consequences. Charleroi has a limited tax base, aging housing stock, and lean municipal services by necessity, not choice. Our police department is small. Our fire department is volunteer. Our ambulance service is nonprofit and operates on the margins of financial viability.

We are not a sanctuary city, a border community, or a major metropolitan area with layered social service infrastructure. Yet we were treated as if we were.

A FEDERAL DECISION WITH LOCAL CONSEQUENCES

The placement of large numbers of migrants into Charleroi was not initiated by our Borough Council. We were not asked if we had the housing capacity, public safety resources, school support, or healthcare infrastructure to absorb this population.

Federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations placed individuals into our housing, schools, and neighborhoods without providing proportional investments in policing, emergency medical services, housing inspections, translation services, healthcare capacity, or infrastructure.

The outcome was predictable—and preventable.

STRAIN ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Charleroi's police department, volunteer fire department, ambulance service, and code enforcement office have all experienced a significant increase in service calls. Many of these calls involve language barriers, overcrowded housing conditions, and unfamiliarity with local laws and traffic regulations.

Charleroi does not have a paid dedicated interpreter or translation service. Our first responders now spend significantly more time on each call, stretching limited resources and increasing response times for everyone in the community.

Our ambulance service is currently carrying more than \$250,000 in uncollectible debt tied to the migrant emergency calls. For a small nonprofit service, this level of uncompensated care is unsustainable and places the entire community at risk. Our volunteer fire department is feeling the brunt of the financial strain the immigrant community has placed on their shoe-string budget.

Our code enforcement office has been overwhelmed by unsafe and overcrowded rental properties, some housing double or triple their intended occupancy. These conditions pose serious risks to occupants, neighboring residents, and first responders.

SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY STABILITY

Let me be clear: the individuals arriving in Charleroi are human beings. But local residents are human beings as well, and they are tax paying American citizens who have done nothing wrong and who are bearing the consequences of the Biden administration immigration policies. The photographs and documentation I submitted is not exaggerated and it is certainly not a joke. It makes our community very angry that our town has experienced frequent car crashes caused by the migrant drivers. This has wreaked havoc on the non-at fault parties who had to pay the price. Vehicles driven by unlicensed, uninsured, and non-English speaking drivers are involved in daily collisions on narrow residential streets, cars overturning, plowing into homes, businesses and destroying personal property. Even the current and former Mayors own property has been damaged under these circumstances. This is reality in Charleroi folks, where the posted speed-limit in Charleroi is 25 mph or less. Families are afraid in their own neighborhoods. Seniors are frightened to walk outside. This is not just about traffic safety. Charleroi has suffered severe reputational and legal harm. The U.S Justice Department successfully prosecuted a Charleroi staffing agency owner, sentencing him to prison and ordered over \$3.6 million in restitution for harboring illegal aliens and failing to pay employment taxes. There has been a targeted killing of an immigrant tied to the immigrant van agencies. Another immigrant death is currently under investigation by the Washington County District Attorney's office. These events have placed a national spotlight on a small borough that lacks the resources, staffing and infrastructure to manage the fallout.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN

Our local school district has absorbed a large number of non-English-speaking students in a very short period of time without sufficient federal funding for translators, classroom aides, or specialized instructional support.

Teachers and administrators have worked heroically, but classroom disruption and strained special education services affect every child in the district. This is not a failure of compassion—it is a failure of planning.

WHY CHARLEROI MATTERS

Charleroi has become a national symbol because it illustrates a hard truth: when immigration policy is disconnected from local capacity, small towns become collateral damage.

We did not have the option to say no. We were not given a seat at the table. We did not receive proportional funding. Yet we are expected to manage the consequences indefinitely.

REQUESTS.

As a resident and councilman in the Borough of Charleroi, I respectfully urge Congress to:

- Require mandatory consultation with local governments before migrant or refugee placements occur.
- Limit placements to levels communities can realistically support based on housing, public safety, school, and healthcare capacity.
- Provide direct, flexible federal funding to municipalities absorbing migrant populations so local taxpayers are not left carrying the burden.
- Increase transparency, accountability, and oversight of nonprofit organizations involved in placement decisions.
- Reaffirm that immigration policy must balance humanitarian objectives with the safety, stability, and wellbeing of American communities.

CONCLUSION

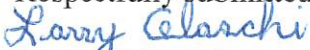
Charleroi is not anti-immigrant. I support legal immigration and the American Dream pursued through lawful means. However, what has been imposed on our borough has pushed public services to the breaking point and fundamentally altered our community without its consent.

What happened in Charleroi should not be repeated elsewhere.

If Congress seeks honest testimony about the real-world consequences of current immigration policy, Charleroi stands ready to provide it—not as a talking point, but as a warning.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am prepared to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Respectfully submitted,



Larry Celaschi

Councilman, Borough of Charleroi
Washington County, Pennsylvania

Death of Charleroi man under investigation

JUL 22, 2025

The Charleroi Regional Police Department is investigating the death of a man who was found on a borough street Sunday night.

Washington County Coroner Timothy Warco identified the man as 33-year-old Duvanet Esperance of Charleroi.

According to a Washington County 911 supervisor, Esperance was found at about 9:30 p.m. along Fallowfield Avenue in Charleroi. He was transported to Penn Highlands-Mon Valley Hospital.

The supervisor stated that the 911 caller reported that it appeared Esperance had been assaulted, but Washington County District Attorney Jason Walsh said the incident remains under investigation.

"We don't necessarily know if he was assaulted," Walsh said.

Walsh added there was no threat to the public.

The coroner's office was called to the hospital, and Esperance was declared dead at 10:14 p.m.

According to Warco's report, Esperance's cause and manner of death are pending further investigation.

Charleroi Regional Police Department did not return phone calls and an email seeking additional information.



Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney Troy Rivetti
Western District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 22, 2025
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV/USAO/PAW

Charleroi Staffing Agency Owner Sentenced to Prison and Ordered to Pay More Than \$3.6 Million in Restitution for Harboring Illegal Aliens and Failing to Pay Employment Taxes

PITTSBURGH, Pa. - A resident of Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania, has been sentenced in federal court to 30 months of imprisonment and ordered to pay \$3,630,479.13 on his convictions of failing to pay employment taxes and harboring individuals who were not legally authorized to be in the United States, Acting United States Attorney Troy Rivetti announced today.

United States District Judge Cathy Bissoon imposed the sentence on Andy Ha, 28. Ha pleaded guilty to the charges in February of 2025 (read the plea news release [here](#)).

According to information presented to the Court, Ha was the president and owner of the Charleroi staffing agency Prosperity Services, Inc., where Ha employed individuals who were not legally authorized to be in the United States, and paid for such workers to stay in a former hotel. Ha signed false employment tax returns on behalf of the agency, in which Ha reported less than 10% of Prosperity's employees. Ha and Prosperity failed to pay taxes on the other unreported employees, resulting in a tax loss of at least \$3.1 million over the course of a year.

Assistant United States Attorney William Guappone prosecuted this case on behalf of the government.

Acting United States Attorney Rivetti commended the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation and Homeland Security Investigations for the investigation leading to the successful prosecution of Ha.

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Staffing agency owner sentenced for failure to pay \$3.6M in taxes on illegal workers

Andy Ha, 28, of Belle Vernon pleaded guilty in February to harboring illegal aliens for financial gain and failure to pay employment taxes.

By the MVI

A Belle Vernon man who ran a temporary staffing agency and failed to pay \$3.6 million in employment taxes for illegal employees will serve 2 1/2 years in federal prison.

Andy Ha, 28, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Cathy Bissoon in

Pittsburgh on Tuesday. He pleaded guilty in February to failure to pay taxes and harboring illegal aliens for financial gain.

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, Ha owned Prosperity Services Inc., which provided workers to companies in the Charleroi area.

Investigators said Ha provided employment, housing and transportation for more than 25 workers who were not legally permitted to be in — or work — in the United States.

The U.S. Attorney's Office said Ha provided Prosperi-

ty's tax return preparer false spreadsheets that listed only the company's employees who were authorized to work in the U.S. and were paid by check.

That spreadsheet, the government said, listed less than 10% of Prosperity's total workers.

The company's quarterly filings, the prosecution said, dramatically understated the amount of employment tax due each quarter.

The sentencing guidelines called for a prison term of 30 to 37 months incarceration.

ILLEGAL WORKERS • A4



WPXI-TV



Pittsburgh



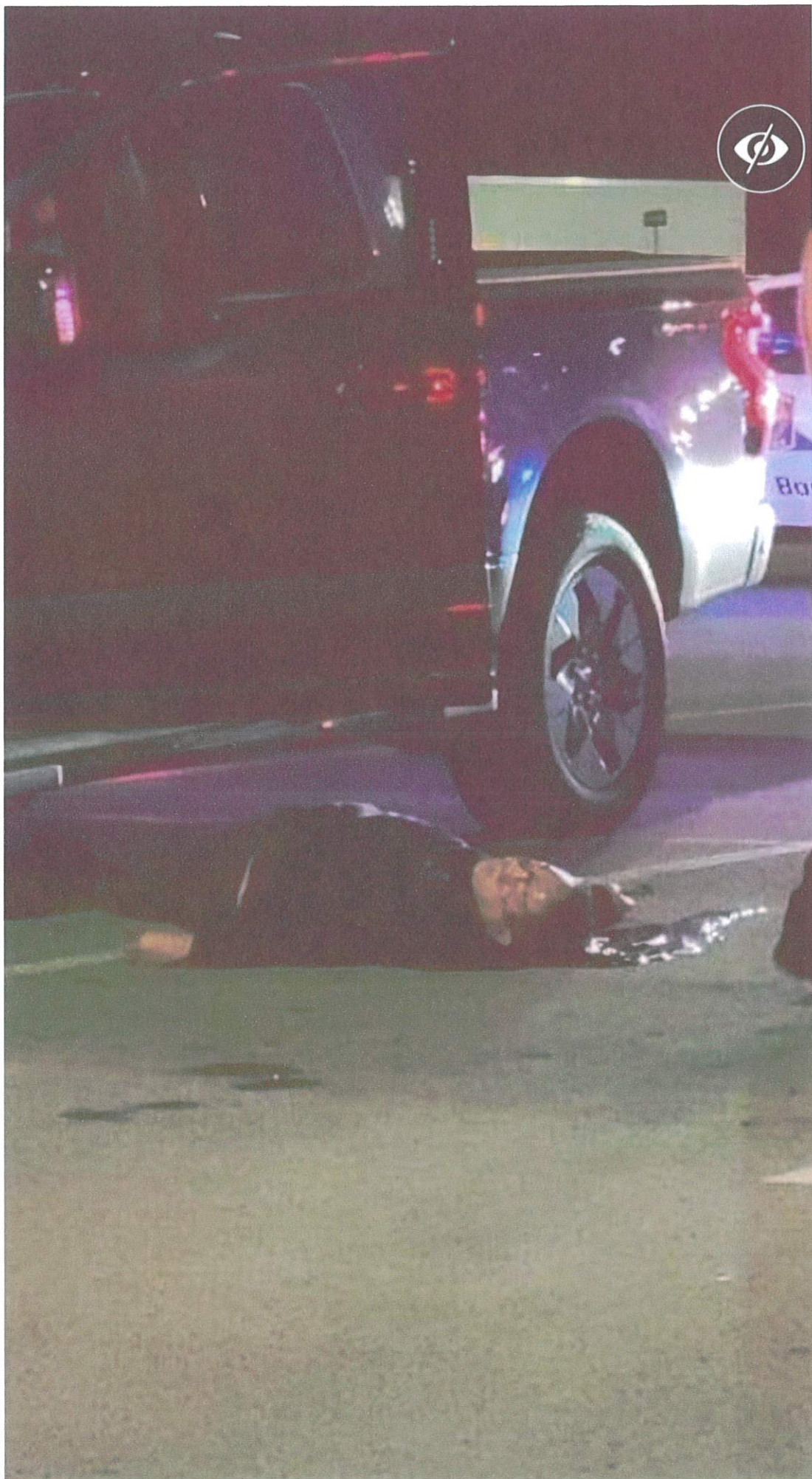
4h · 

The owner of a Charleroi staffing agency was sentenced to years in prison and ordered to pay millions of dollars in restitution on convictions of harboring illegal aliens for financial gain.



wpxi.com

Charleroi staffing agency owner



Car crashes becoming concern in Charleroi

Council members were asked to take action to improve safety at last week's meeting.

By **TAYLOR BROWN**

Senior Reporter

tbrown@yourmvi.com

An increased number of vehicle accidents in Charleroi have officials wondering how to best address the problem.

During last week's council meeting, resident Jodi Cheplic discussed the issue and asked council to take action.

Cheplic said many people are aware of the problem, but something needs to be done.

"Cars are going the wrong way and there are wrecks at least once a week," she said. "Something has to be done. Someone is going to be killed."

Cheplic said she was recently almost hit near Lincoln Avenue and Sixth Street.

"If I would not have gone onto the sidewalk, she would have hit me head on," Cheplic said. "I don't care how much it costs or if you have to put up signs on every corner of town."

Cheplic said if immigrant community members can't

"I agree something needs to be done, but how many more signs can we put up? (This) shows the signs are not working."

PAUL PIVOVARNIK
CHARLEROI COUNCILMAN

other drivers.

"It's about their safety too," Cheplic said.

She referred to posts on social media about frequent accidents.

"You can only believe half of everything you see on Facebook, when it is on Facebook every day, we need signs they can understand," she said. "I am not trying to criticize anyone if they can't understand, but it would help them too."

Cheplic said thankfully no one was hurt, but she was left shaken up.

"It shouldn't be going on," she said. "It's every couple days. Spend some money, get signs up. It's for the town and everyone's safety so I hope you take this into sincere consideration."

BOROUGH OF CHARLEROI

Councilman raises concerns about frequent vehicle crashes

Councilman Larry Celaschi wants council to meet with first responders to see how best to tackle accidents in the borough.

By TAYLOR BROWN

Senior Reporter

tbrown@yourmvi.com

Despite efforts to update traffic lights and signage

still happening more frequently than anyone would like on borough streets.

During Wednesday's meeting, Councilman Larry Celaschi wanted to discuss how to handle the problem, which was last brought up in September after several residents attended a meeting to express their concerns about an increased number of accidents in the community.

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Steel Signal · 

According to KDKA, the immigrant population of the small Washington County town has increased by 2000% in just two years, and the local school district has had to spend \$400,000 on English-as-a-foreign-language teachers and interpreters. The local superintendent has so far been unsuccessful in finding additional resources to help address the challenges arising from the mass immigration.

<https://thesteelsignal.com/it-feels-like-an-invasion-charleroi-resident-on-haitian>



Southwest PA News

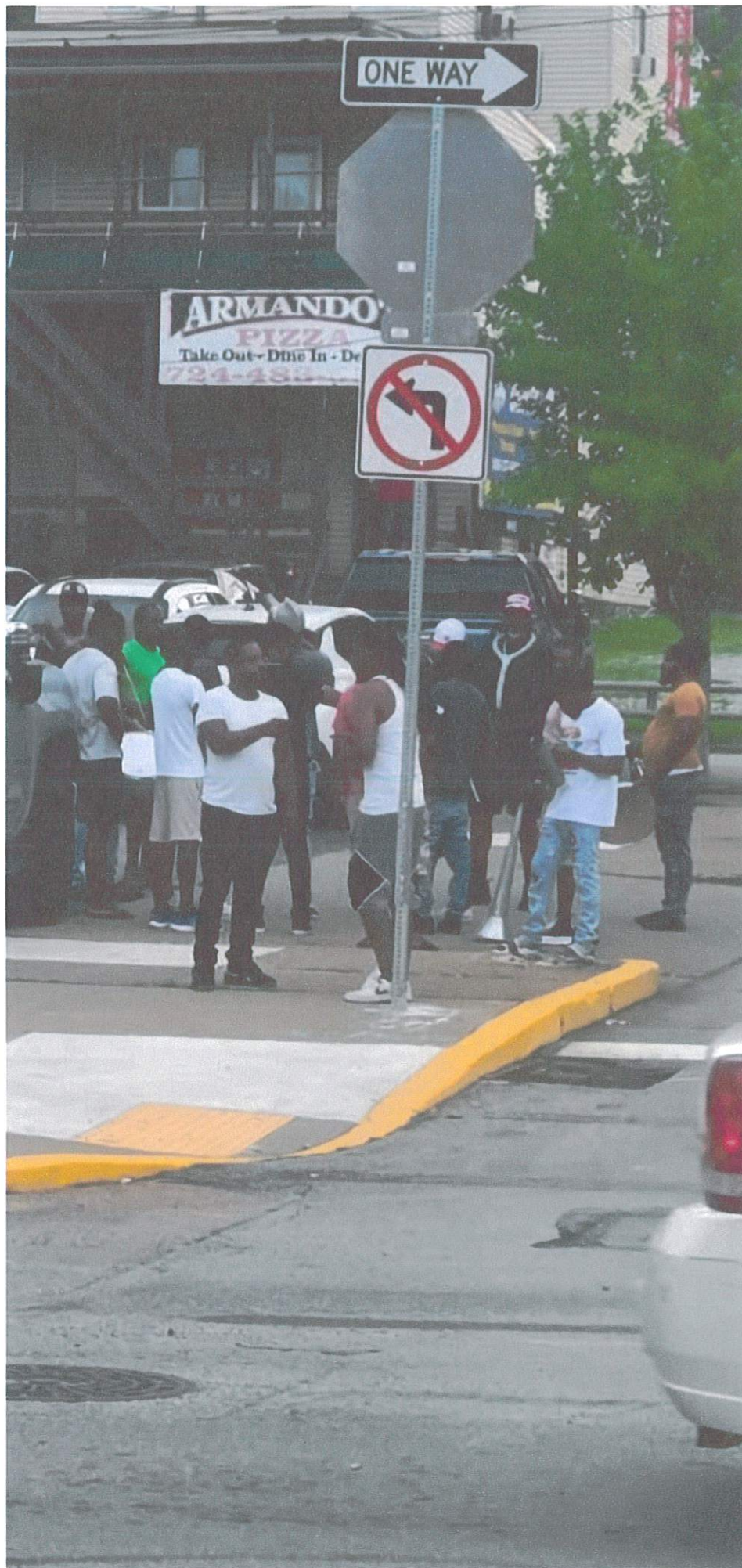
He said he contacted U.S. Sen. Carolyn McCormick's office to request financial relief for the borough.

"I sent an email to Senator McCormick's office just yesterday, requesting support and financial relief for the borough," he said. "We've got to demonstrate harm, and I think we can actually do that."

Celaschi said Charleroi has increased its police budget, added a full-time firefighter, and is seeing ambulance services overwhelmed.

"When Charleroi had an influx of immigrants come into the community, no one told us and no one got us prepared, nor were there any resources that came with it to help the borough adapt to what took place," Celaschi said. "(They) didn't help very much. The school district didn't get help; they had to beg. The borough has not received one penny."

He said his frustration is directed not at the Haitian immigrants themselves, but at the federal agencies and nonprofit









Larry Michael
Cela...



3m ·

I posted about car crashes being an issue in Charleroi on June 12, 2025. It's now June 6, 2025, and yet another accident just happened in Charleroi. How can anyone still deny there's a serious problem with auto accidents in this community? It's beyond frustrating that some people refuse to see what's right in front of them.



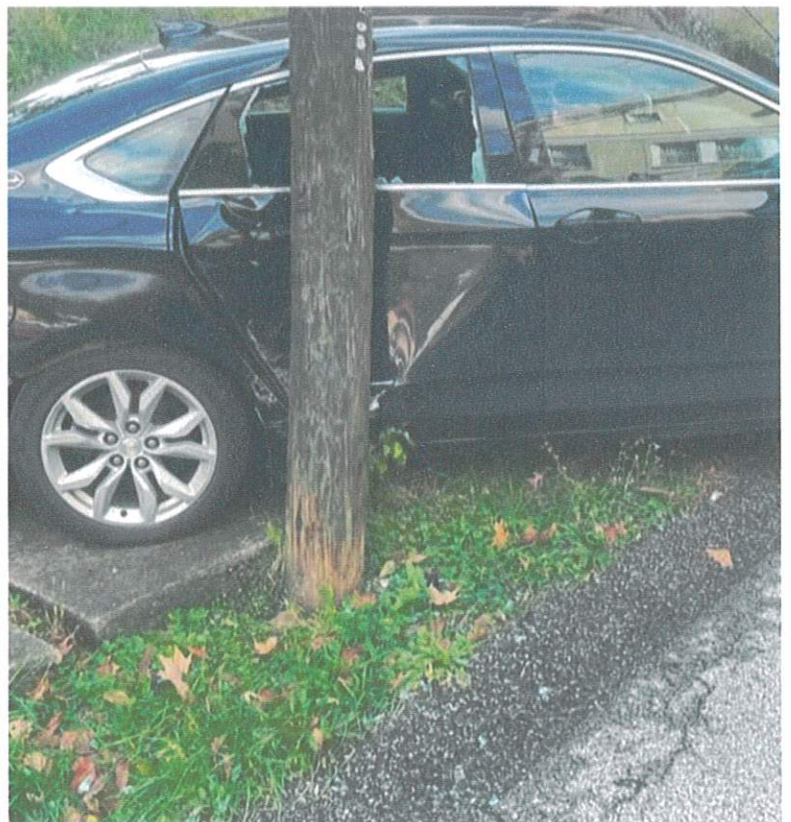


Charleroi Fire Department

Nov 8 · 🌐

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Engine-1 and Car-1 on the scene of an MVA no injuries in the area of 2nd and Lincoln Ave.



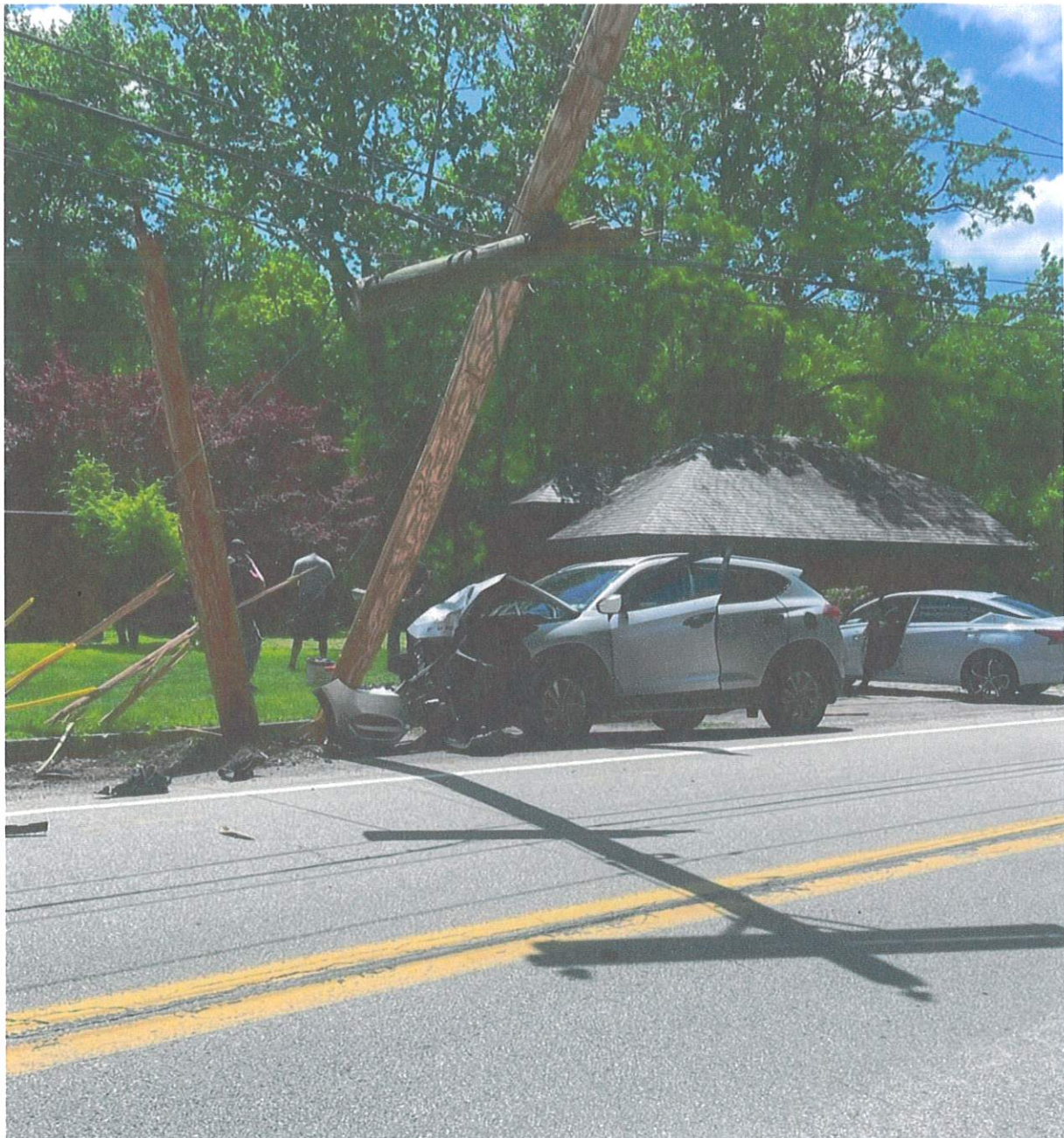


Charleroi Fire Department



May 26 · 

ROAD CLOSED. Lincoln Ave Ext.
by Lee Supply and Old route 71
is closed at this time. Please
use alternate route.





Charleroi Fire Department

May 27 · 🌐

Rescue-33, Squad-1 and Car-1 responded this morning to a roll-over incident in the 900 block of Lincoln Ave, with EMS transporting one patient.

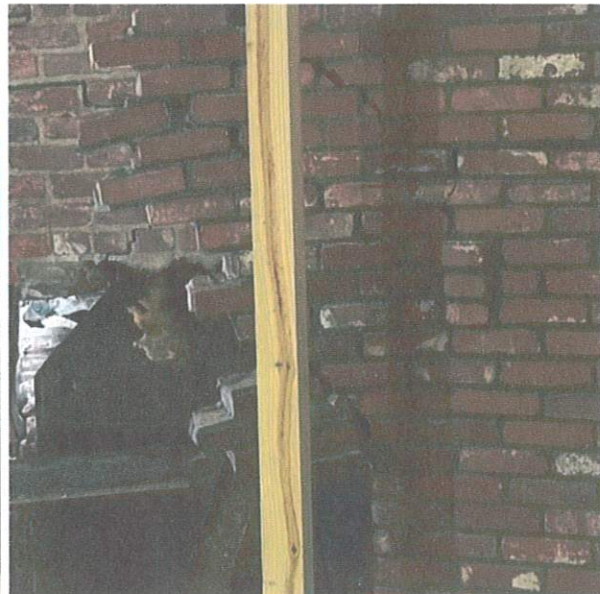
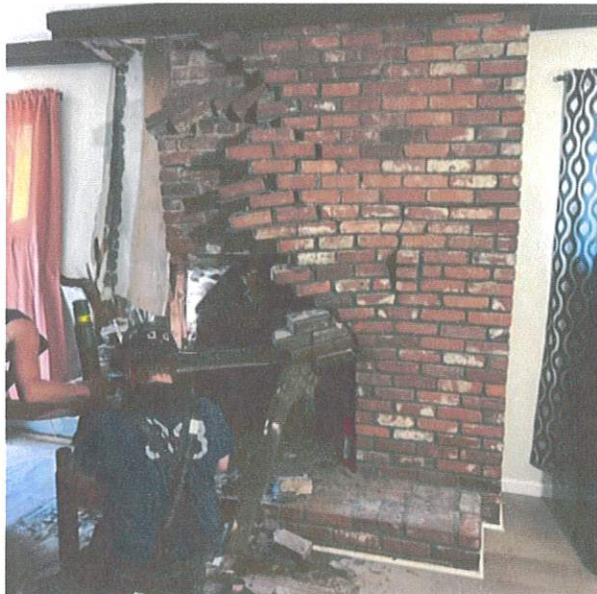




Charleroi Fire Department

Jul 6 · 🌐

At 13:48 this afternoon, Station 33 was dispatched to the area of 8th and Prospect for a vehicle into a house. Charleroi firefighters arrived on the scene to confirm the dispatch with no injuries reported. At this time, a rescue crew from 33 went to work on stabilizing the structure and securing the utilities. Units on the scene include Rescue-33, Car-1, and Squad-3.



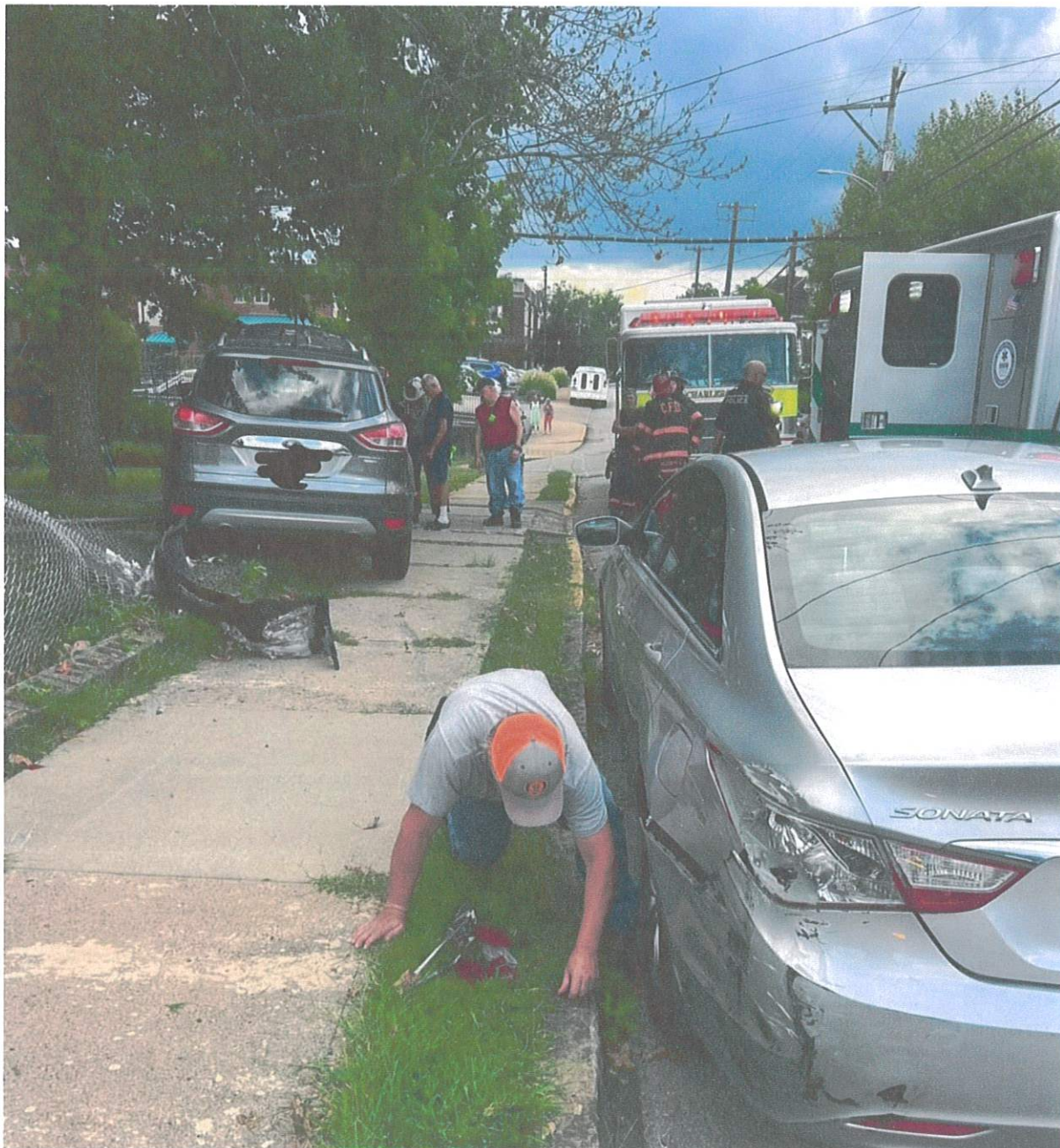


Charleroi Fire Department



Aug 24 · 

Charleroi FD has just cleared the scene of a motor vehicle accident in the area of 6th and Crest Avenue.

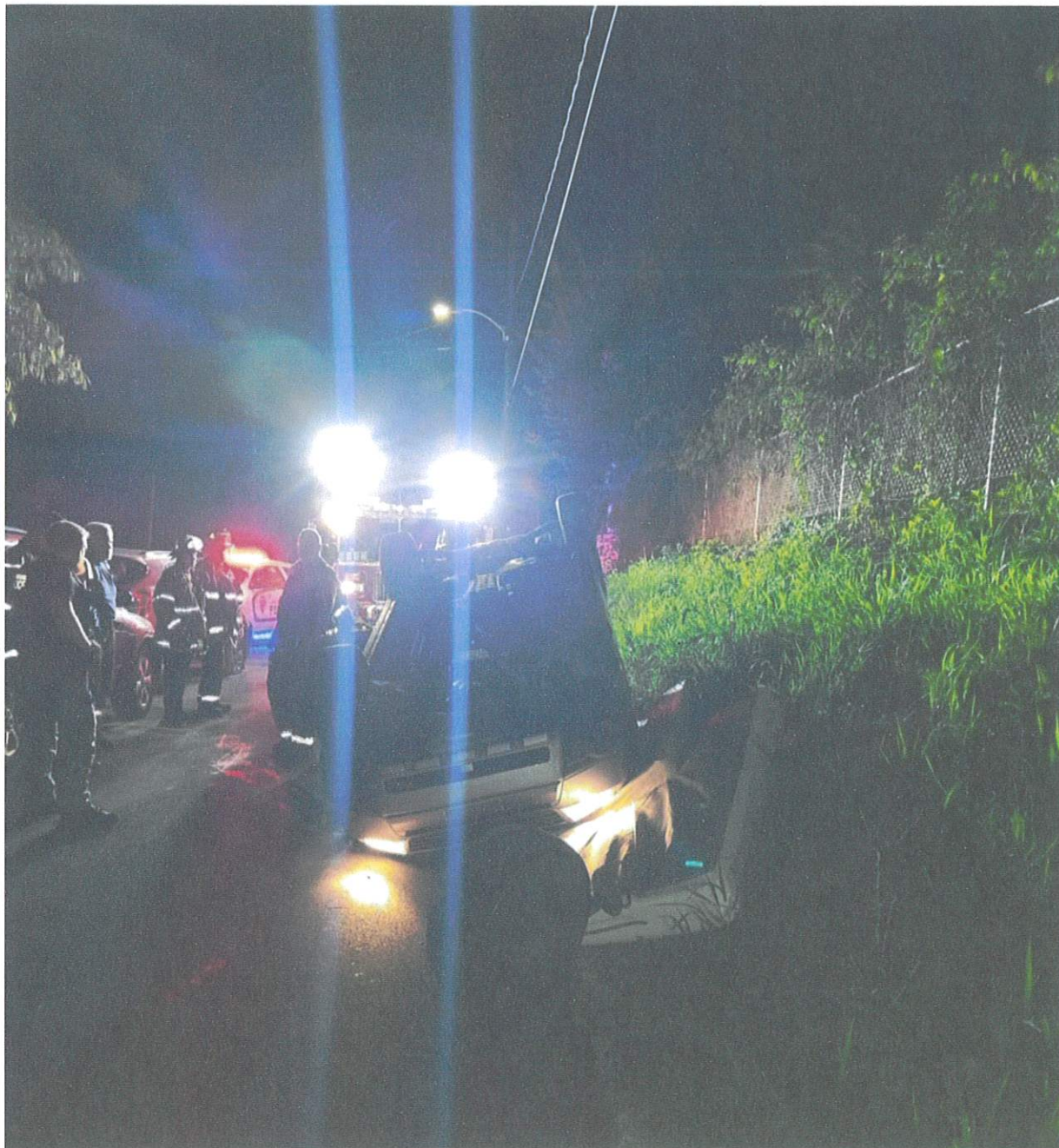




Charleroi Fire Department

Sep 15 · 🌐

Fire, Police and EMS just cleared the scene of a MVA rollover in the 500 block of Lookout Ave. EMS transported 1 patient.

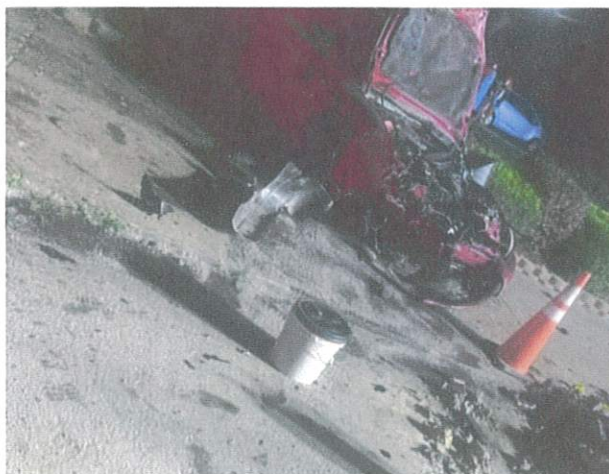




Charleroi Fire Department

Oct 14 · 

This evening, Station 33 responded to a single-vehicle accident with rollover in the 800 block of McKean Avenue. The fire department controlled hazards and assisted Rostraver EMS with patient care. West Penn Power was notified to report to the scene due to a power pole being struck. Rescue 33, Car 1, and Squad 1 managed the accident, while Engine 3 established a landing zone.

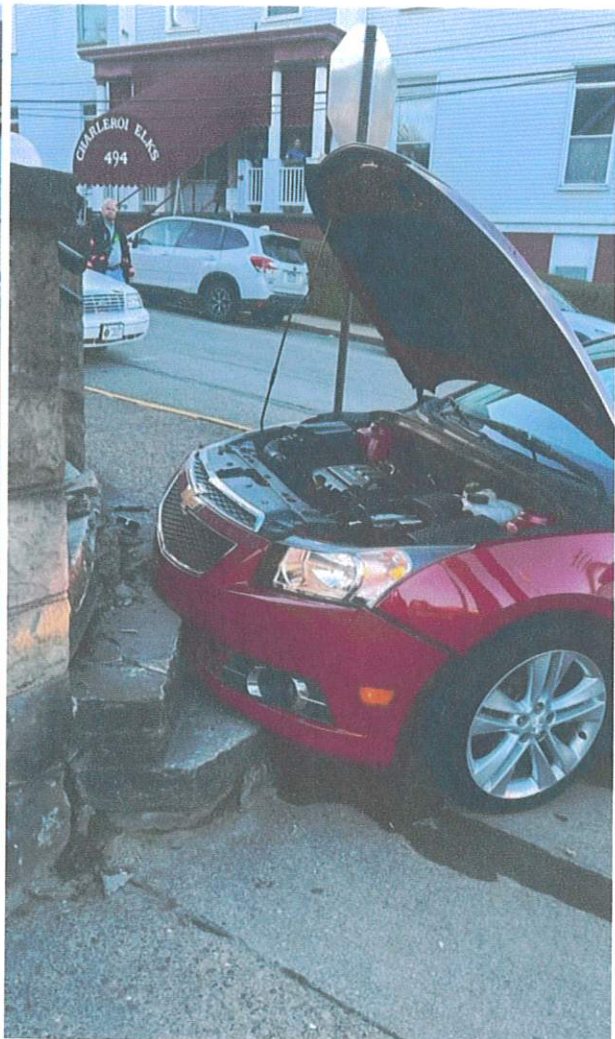
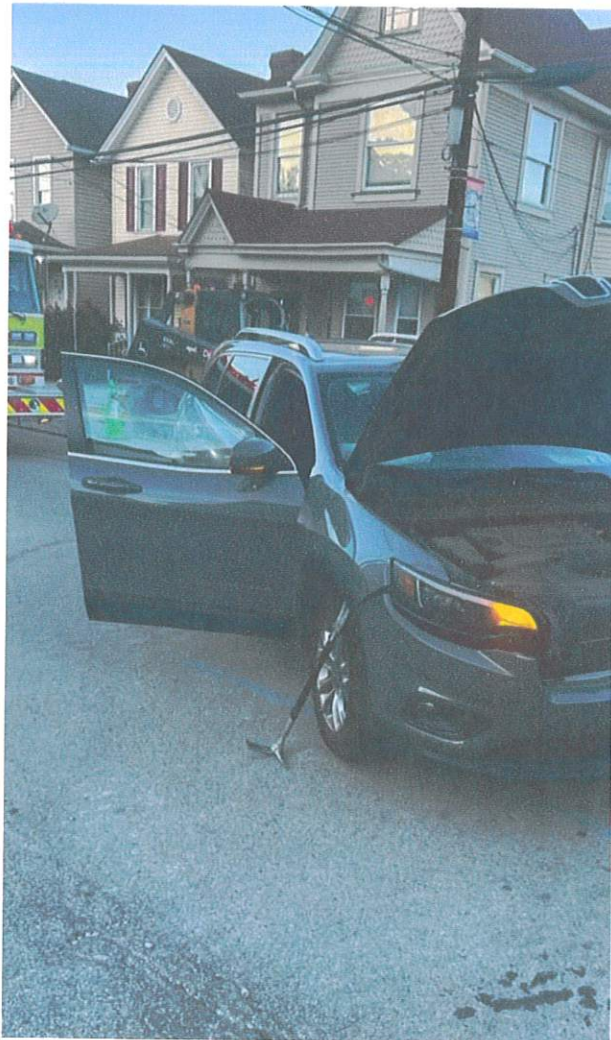




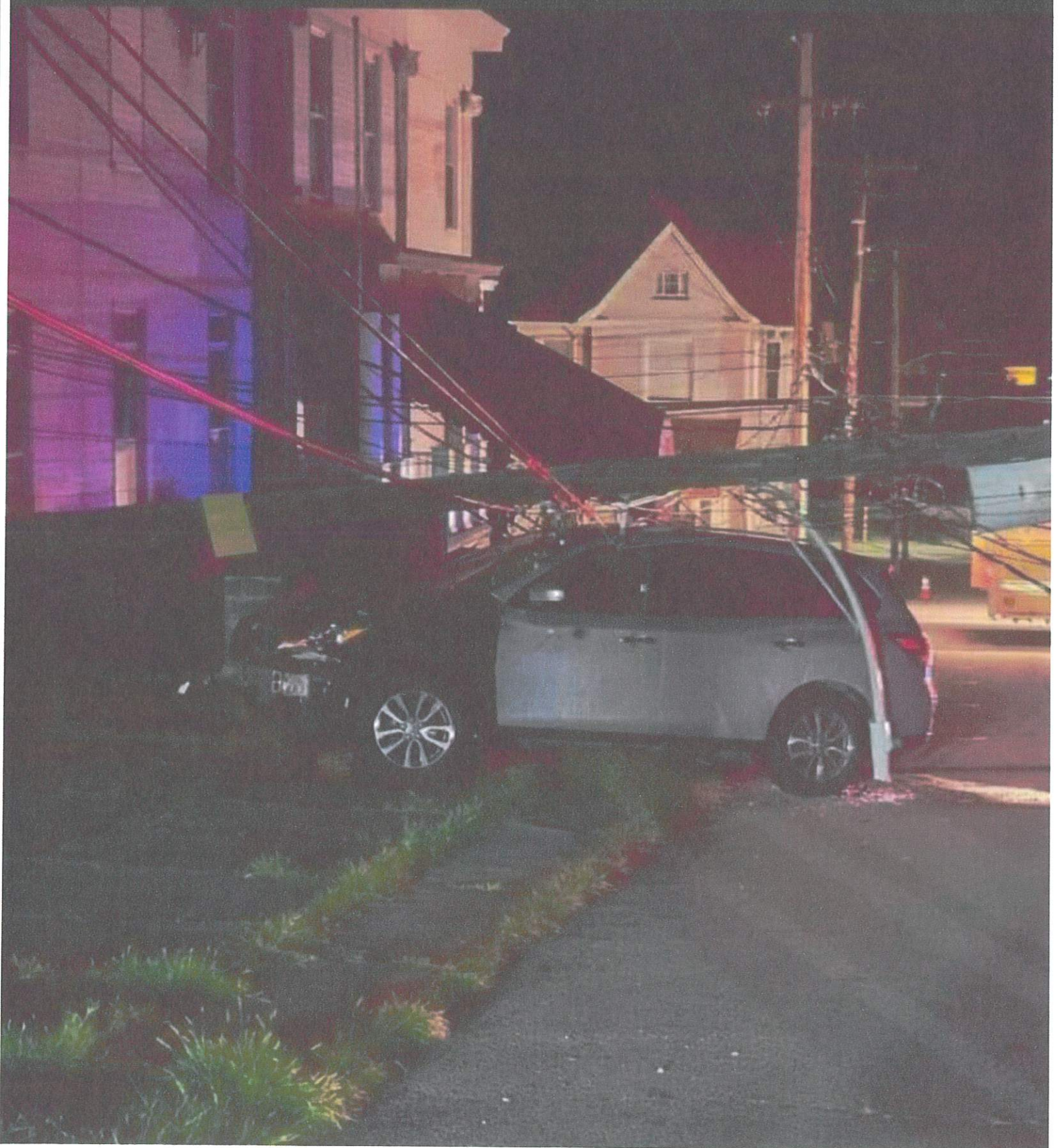
Charleroi Fire Department

Oct 17 · 🌐

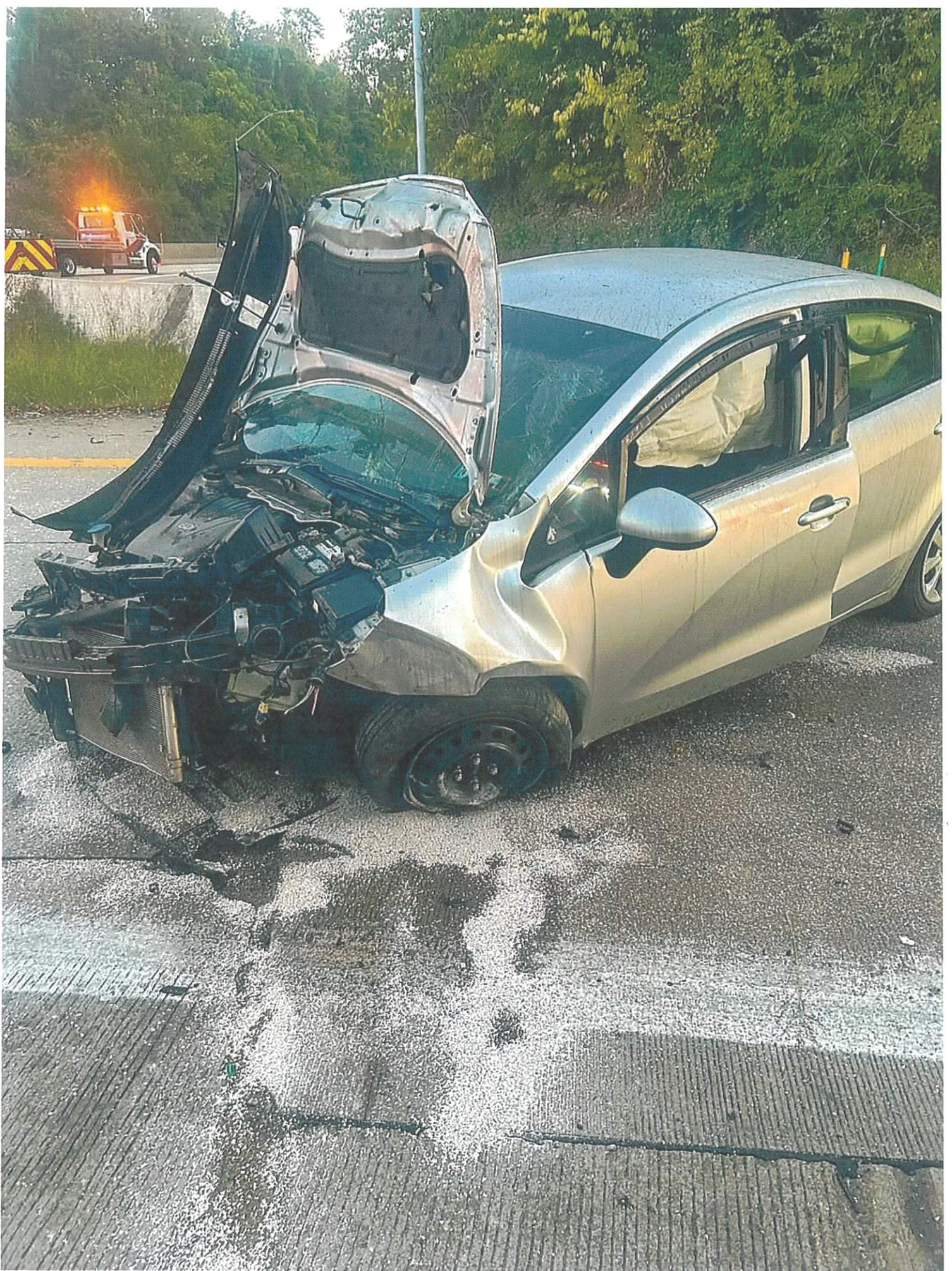
Charleroi FD responded to a 2-vehicle accident at the intersection of 3rd and Fallowfield Avenue this evening. Assisting on the scene was Charleroi police Rostraver EMS and Bujanowski towing.

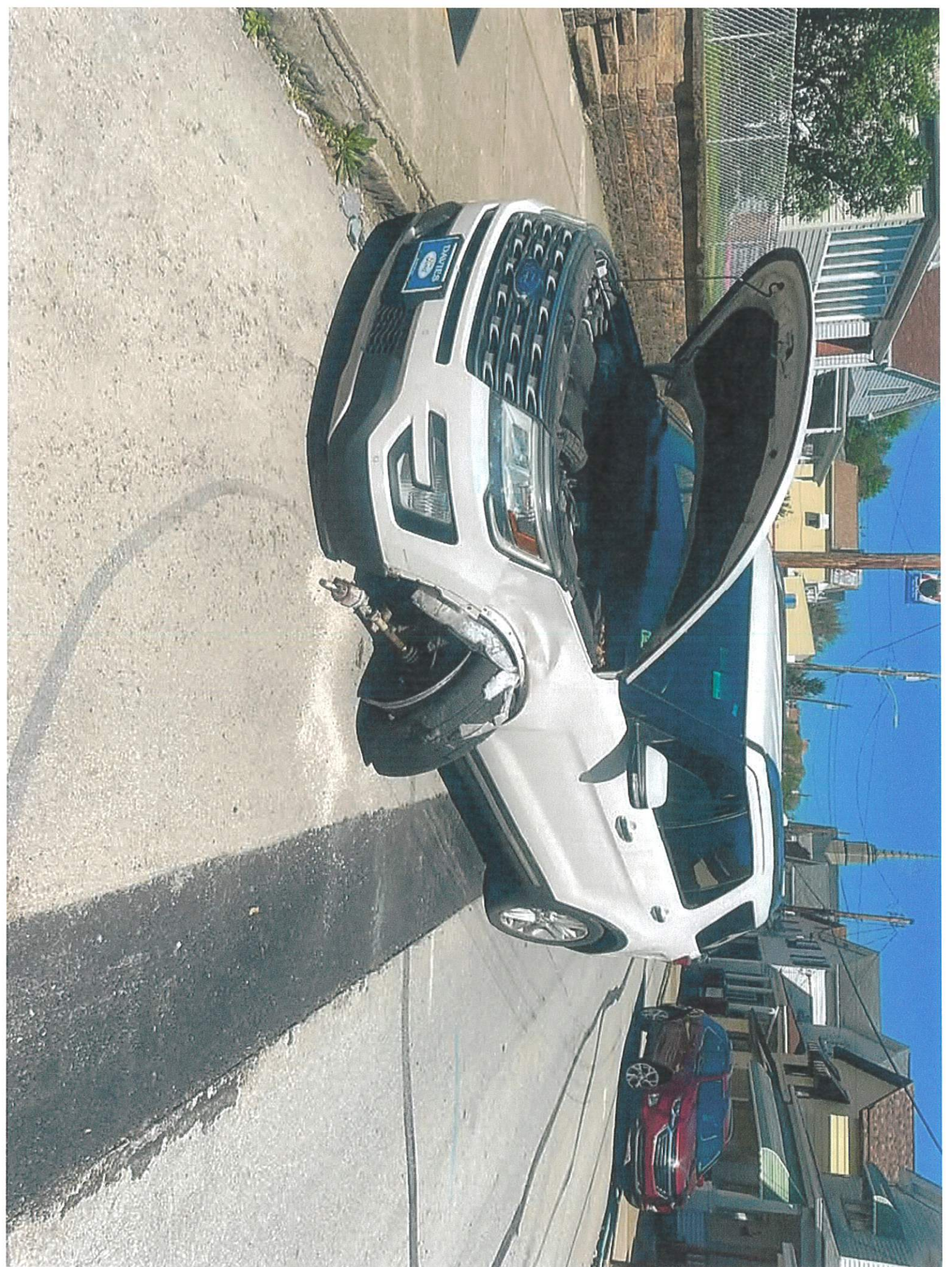


Avoid 3rd St between Fallowfield Ave and
Washington Ave. That section of ro... See more

















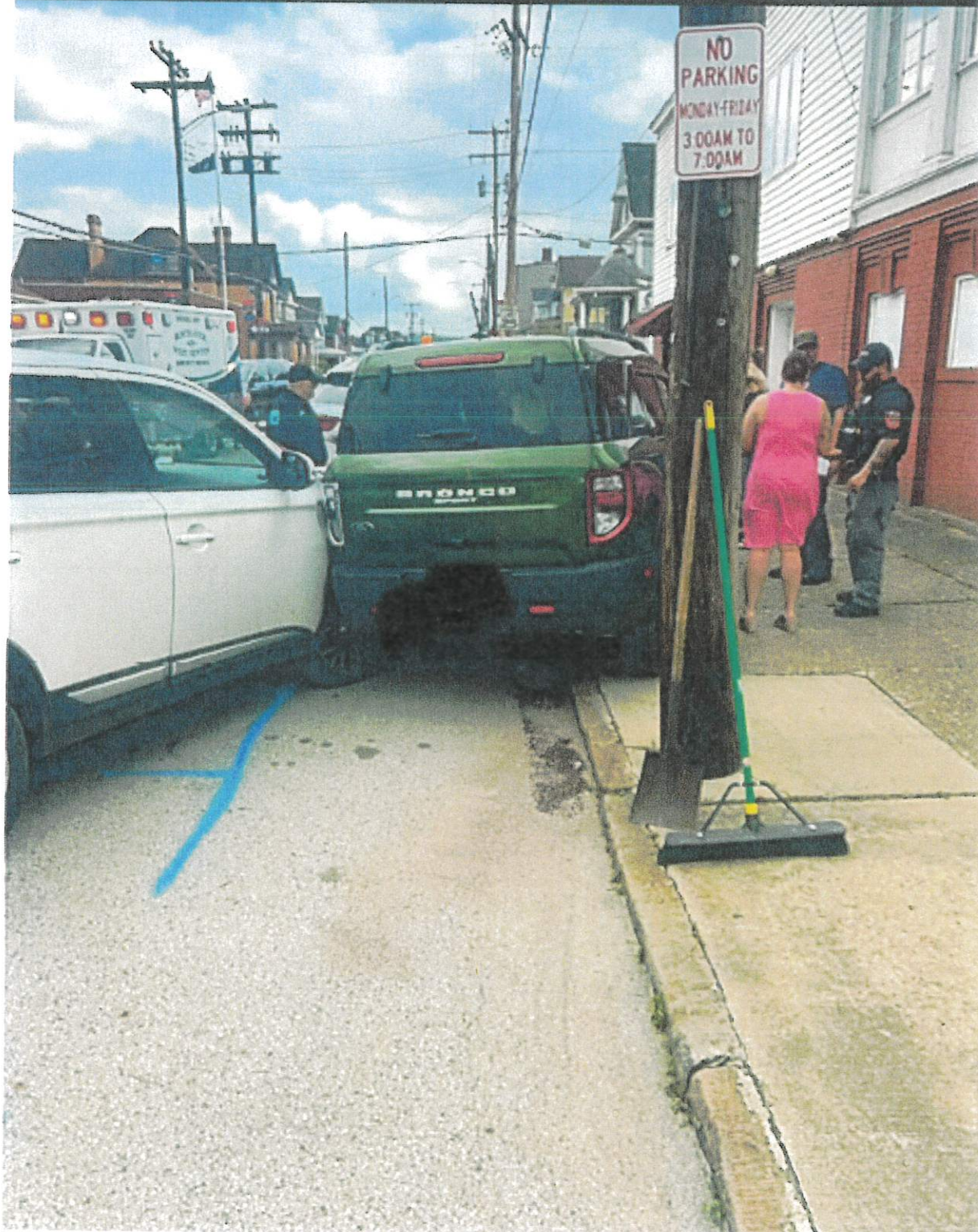


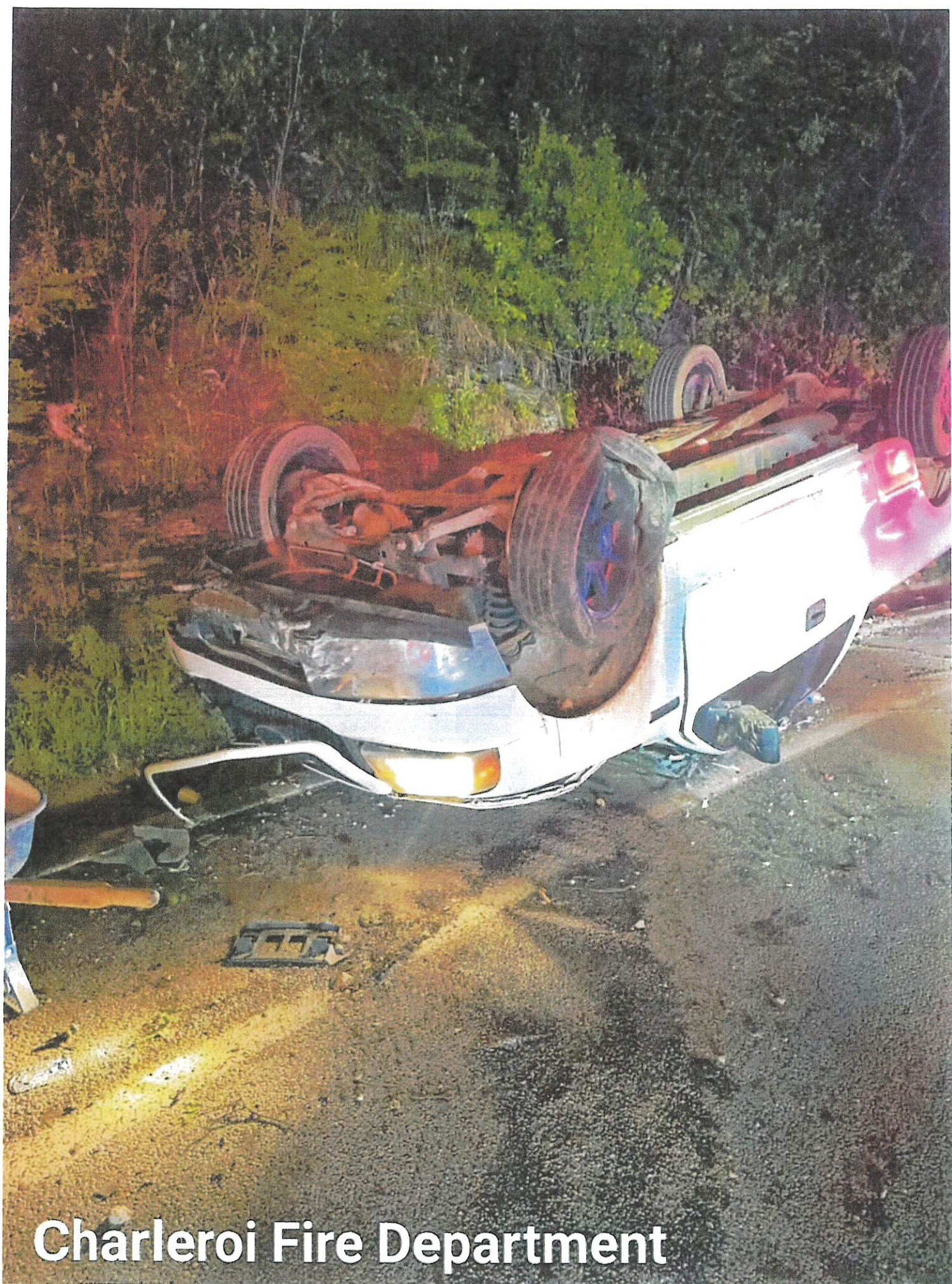
Charleroi Fire Departm... ...



14m · 🌐

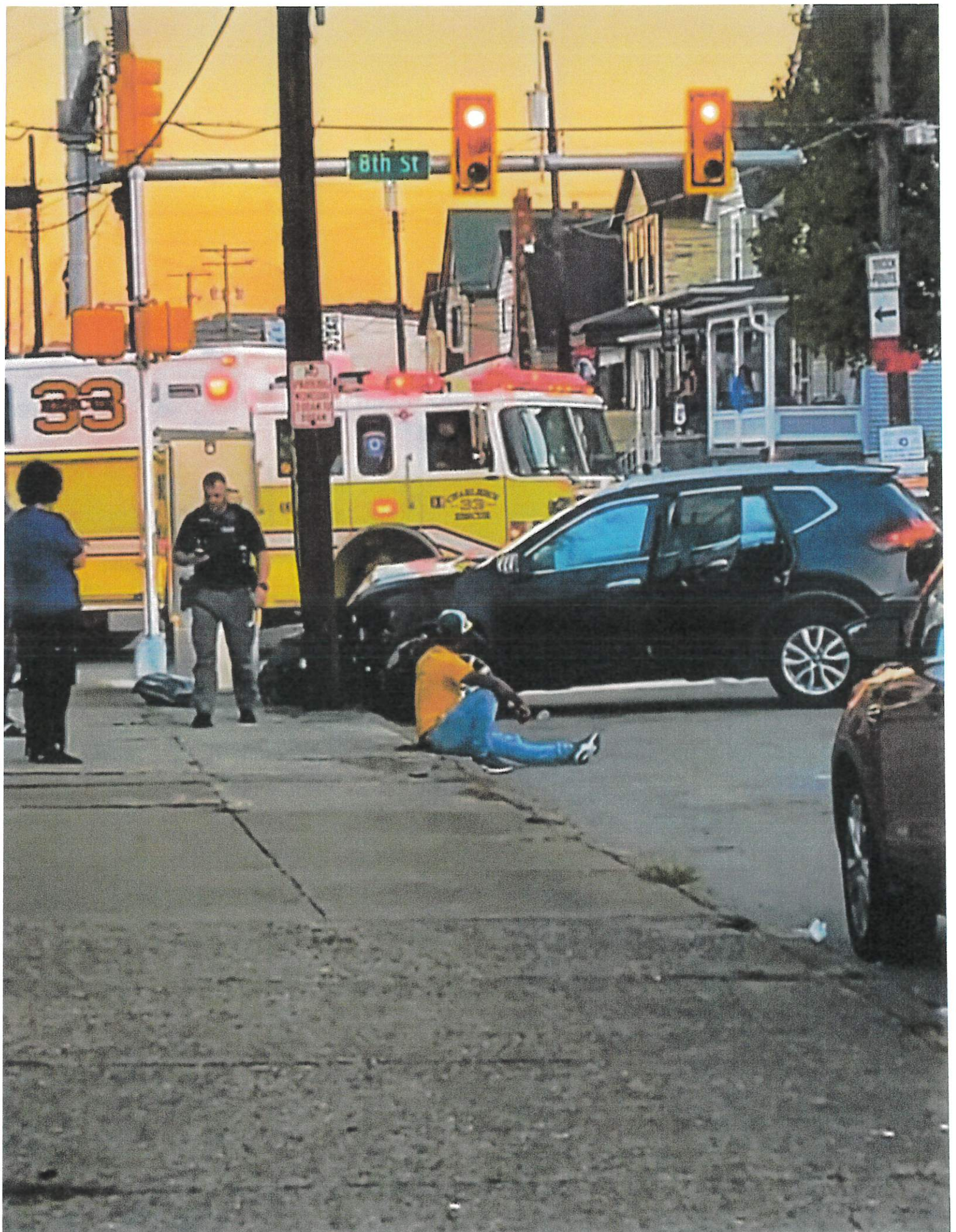
Charleroi firefighters have had another busy day responding to multiple incidents, including a motor vehicle accident at 3rd and Fallowfield Avenue.



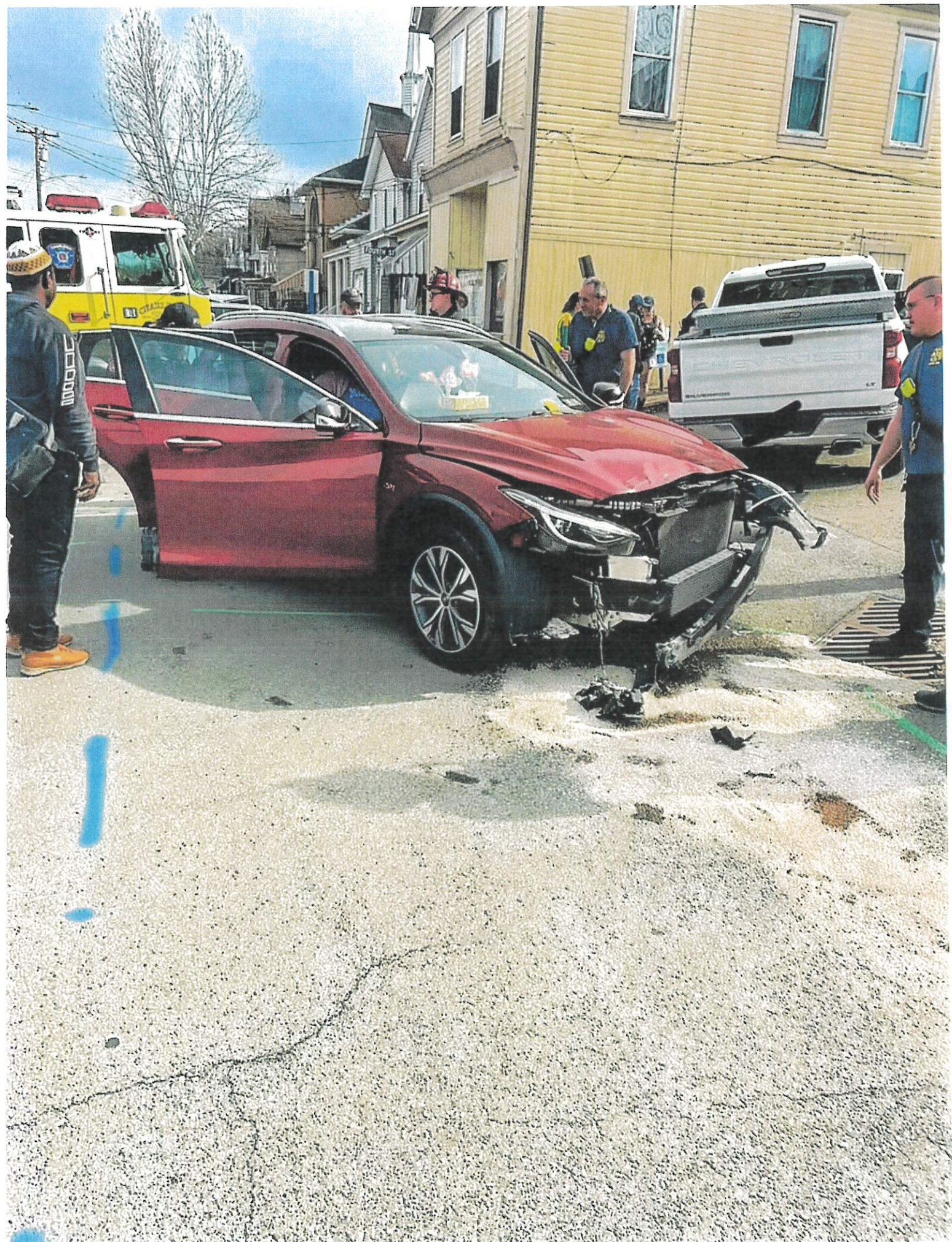


Charleroi Fire Department















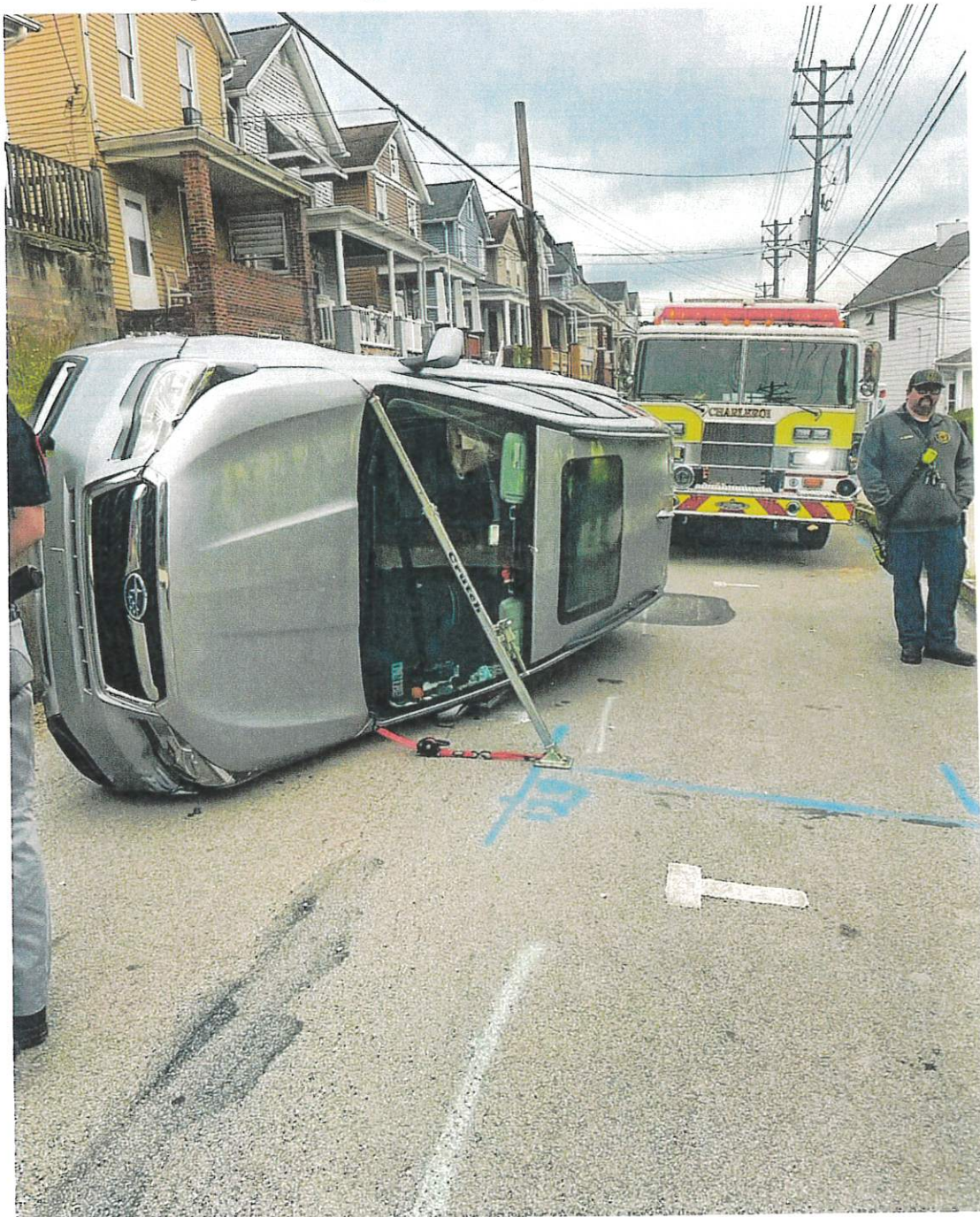
Charleroi Fire D...

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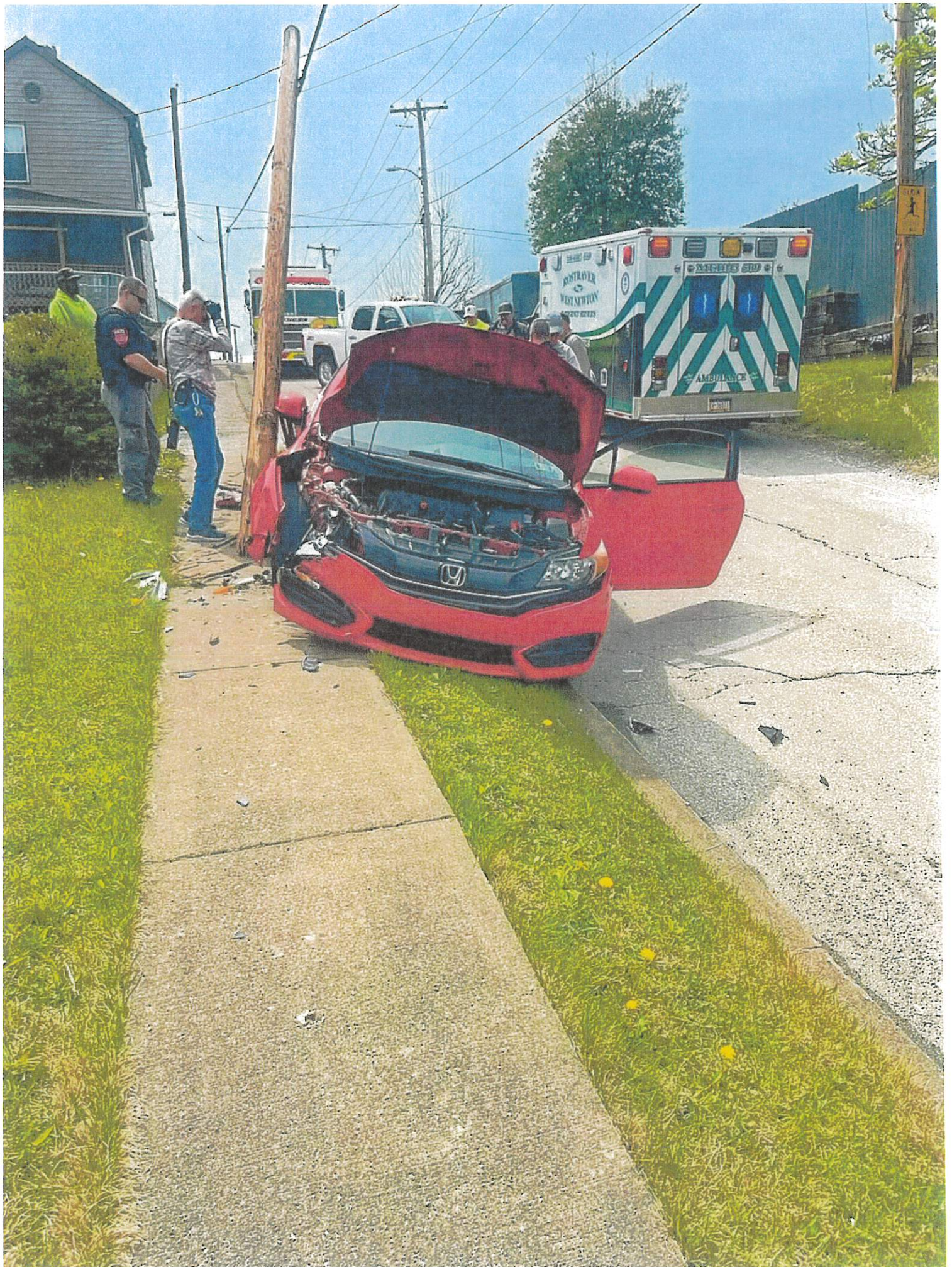
Rescue-33, Squad-1 and Car-1 responded this morning to a roll-over incident in the 900 block of Lincoln Ave, with EMS transporting one patient.





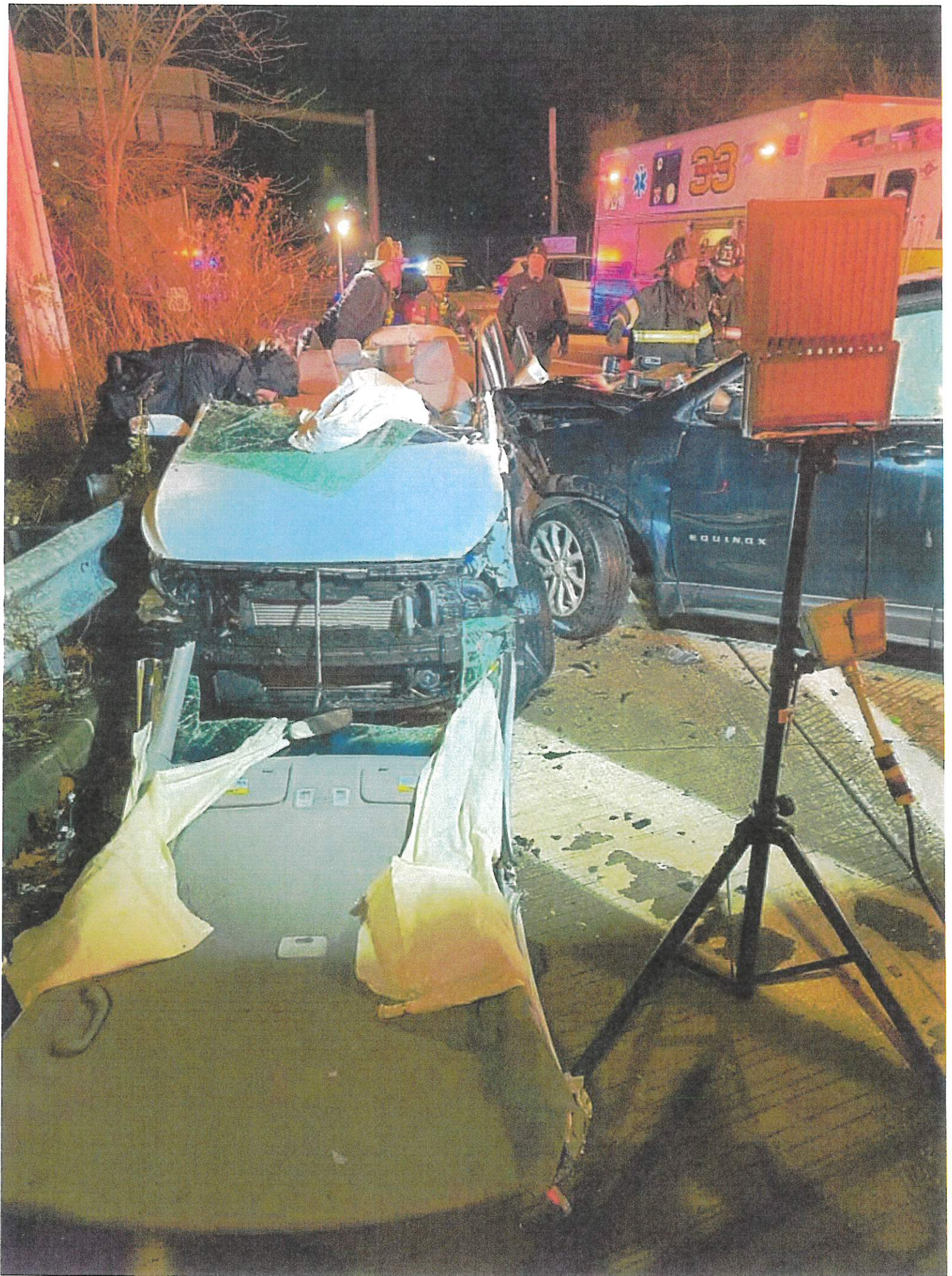
Charleroi Fire Department

ROAD CLOSED. Lincoln Ave Ext.
by Lee Supply and Old route 71
is closed at this time. Please
use alternate route.









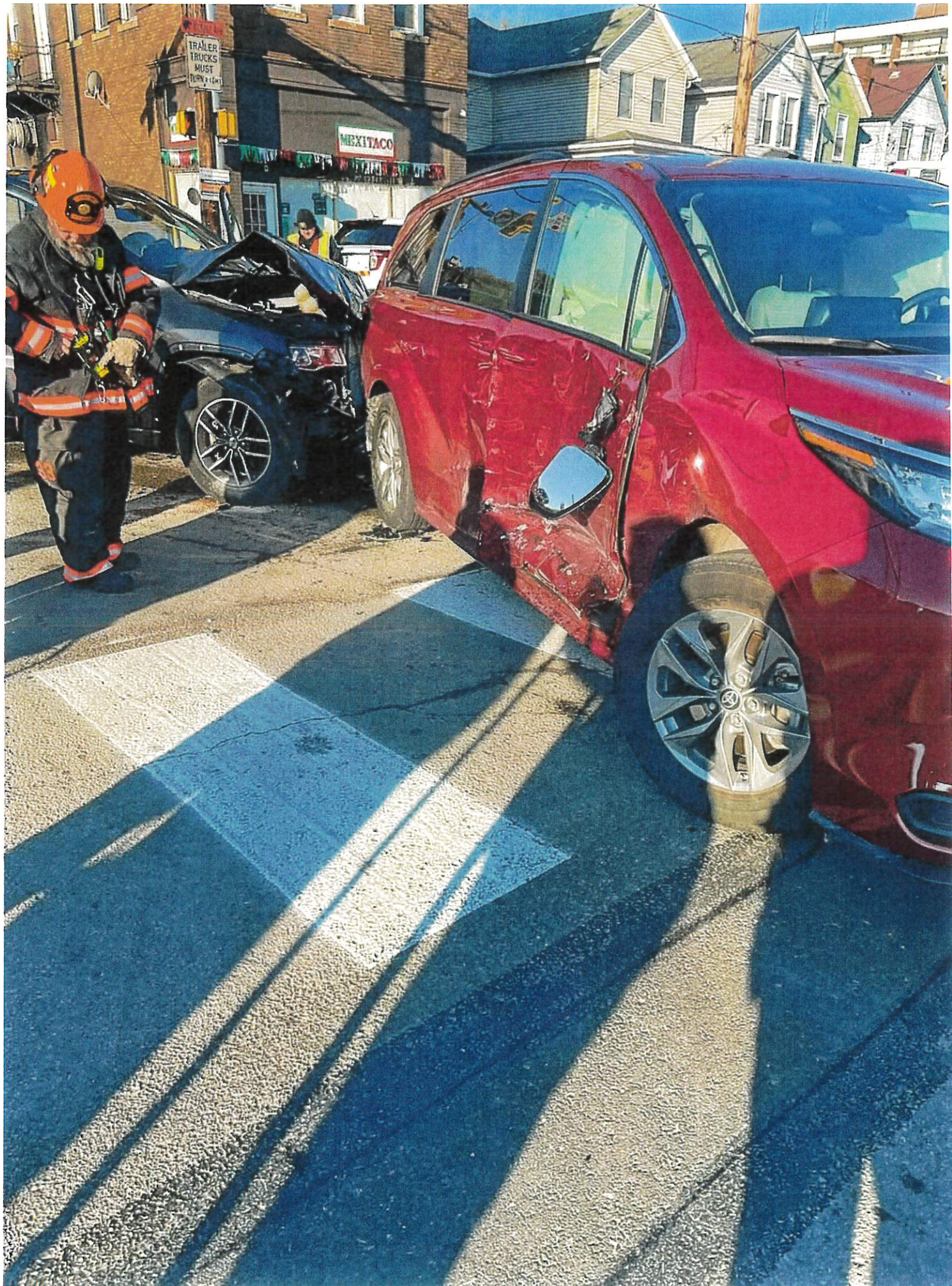








Charlottesville Fire Department

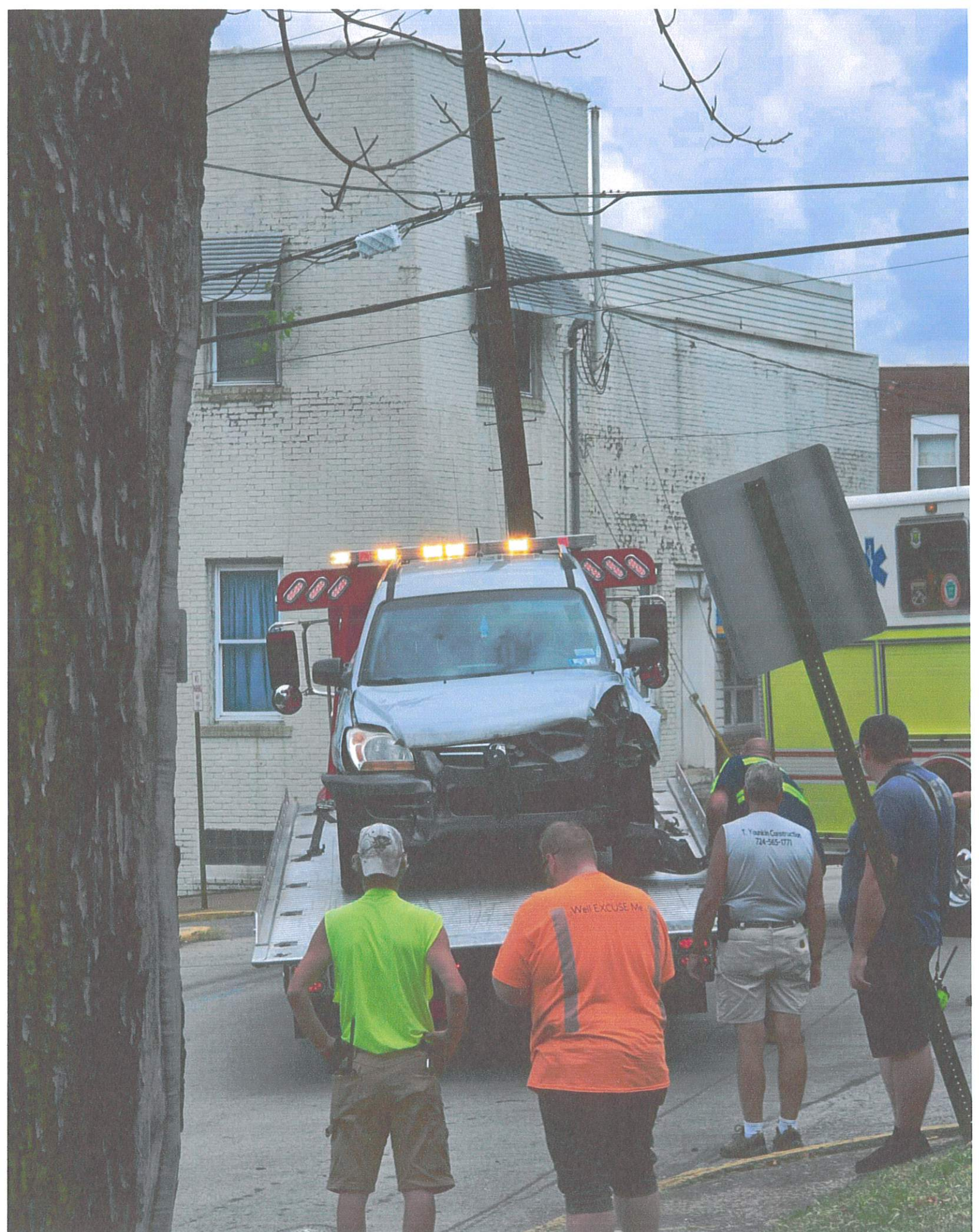


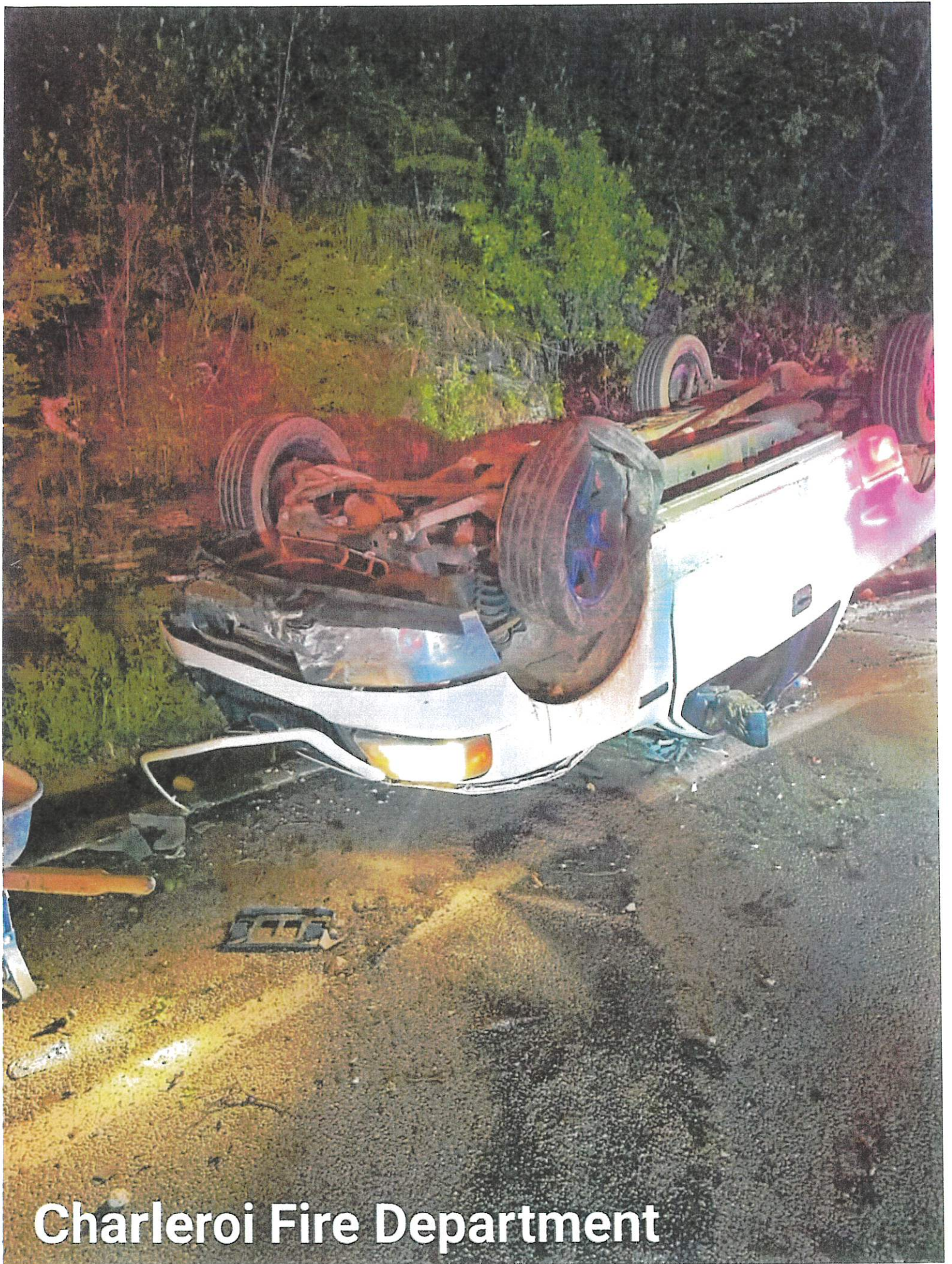












Charleroi Fire Department



