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Crews work to untangle the four-vehicle crash that included two school buses.

Mo. accident kills two

By Jim Salter
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

GRAY SUMMIT, Mo. — Two buses carrying high school band students to an amusement park Thursday slammed into a freeway wreck that happened right in front of them, crushing a pickup truck and killing its driver, as well as one of the students.

Dozens of other students were treated for injuries. The wreck near Gray Summit, about 40 miles west of St. Louis, happened when the pickup truck rear-ended a semi cab that had slowed down because it was nearing a construction zone, state police said.

The first bus, which was carrying female band members from John F. Hodge High in St. James, slammed into the back of the pickup, then was launched on top of it after it was rear-ended by the second bus, State Highway Patrol Cpl. Jeff Wilson said.

Kolby Griffith, 17, said he was chatting with a friend on the second bus when it crashed. "It was all very, very quick," Griffith said. "I was trying to get away, trying to get everyone away from the bus because I could smell gas."

At least 42 students were taken to hospitals, most with injuries not considered life-threatening. Many of them were at SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical

Center in St. Louis when they were called into a room and informed of their bandmate's death.

"There's a lot of pain," Griffith said, choking back tears. Authorities have not publicly identified either of the people killed.

The students were on their way to a Six Flags amusement park some 10 miles from the crash site.

"My goodness. You send your children off to Six Flags, you don't expect this to happen," Missouri State Highway Patrol Sgt. Dan Crain said. "Being parents, we cannot imagine how difficult this is."

Joy Tucker, the superintendent of the St. James school system, said the 3,700-resident town — known for its wineries, natural splendor and trout fishing in nearby Maramec Spring Park — was devastated.

"It's been a horrible, horrible day in our community, and we'll never get over this," Tucker said. "Anytime you have something like this, it is big tragedy for a community," echoed Dennis Wilson, the mayor of St. James. He described the community as "one of those towns where you know just about everyone in town and know their kids," including the nearly 600 children who attend Hodge high school.

Ashley Wiehle, a spokeswoman for Cardinal Glennon, said 36 students were taken to that hospital.

Appeal filed in Calif. law

By Lisa Leff and Paul Elias
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITERS

SAN FRANCISCO — Supporters of California's gay marriage ban have filed an appeal of a federal judge's ruling striking down the voter-approved law.

The appeal late Wednesday to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was expected, as lawyers on both sides of the legal battle repeatedly vowed to carry the fight to a higher court if they lost.

On Wednesday, a federal judge in San Francisco overturned California's Proposition 8, which restricts a marriage to one man and one woman. U.S. District Court Judge Vaughn Walker ruled the law violates federal equal protections and due process laws. The outcome in the appeals court could force the U.S. Supreme Court to confront the question of whether gays have a constitutional right to wed.

"This ruling, if allowed to stand, threatens not only Prop 8 in California but the laws in 45 other states that define marriage as one man and one woman," said Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage, which helped fund the 2008 campaign that led to the

ban's passage. Currently, same-sex couples can legally wed in the U.S. only in Massachusetts, Iowa, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire and Washington, D.C.

The appeal was filed by Protect Marriage, a coalition of religious and conservative groups that sponsored Proposition 8 and wound up defending it after California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Attorney General Jerry Brown refused.

Walker, meanwhile, said he would consider waiting for the 9th Circuit to render its decision before he makes his opinion final and requires the state to stop enforcing the ban. The judge ordered both sides to submit written arguments by Friday on the issue.

California voters passed Proposition 8 five months after the state Supreme Court legalized same-sex unions and an estimated 18,000 same-sex couples already had tied the knot.

Joe Briggs, 32, an actor who attended a West Hollywood gathering, said he was thrilled to hear about the ruling but was curbing his enthusiasm because of the legal fight still ahead.

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