

U.S. NEWS

Trump administration says driver in Florida crash was in US illegally, faults California policy

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FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said Monday that a truck driver accused of making an illegal U-turn that killed three people in Florida was in the country illegally, fueling a verbal tussle with California Gov. Gavin Newsom's office over immigration.

Harjinder Singh made the illegal turn last Tuesday from northbound lanes of Florida's Turnpike about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of West Palm Beach, according to the Florida Highway Patrol. A minivan was unable to avoid the truck's trailer, which was blocking the northbound lanes.

Two passengers in the minivan died at the scene and the driver died at a hospital. Singh and a passenger in his truck were not injured.

Much of Singh's immigration history was not immediately clear Monday, including his country of citizenship and whether and when he obtained legal status. Florida authorities said he entered the U.S. illegally from Mexico in 2018.

Homeland Security said Singh obtained a commercial driver's license in California, which is one of 19 states, in addition to the District of Columbia, that issue licenses regardless of immigration status, according to the National Immigration Law Center. Supporters of such policies say driver's licenses provide a lifeline for people to work, pick up children from school, visit doctors and travel safely.

Tricia McLaughlin, a spokesperson for Homeland Security, said issuing a commercial license to someone in the country illegally is "asinine."

Newsom's press office, which has been in a heated online war of words over congressional redistricting, responded on the X platform that Singh obtained a work permit while Donald Trump was president. McLaughlin disputed that, saying the government denied him a permit during Trump's first term in September 2020 and granted him one in June 2021, under President Joe Biden.

Singh is charged with three state counts of vehicular homicide and immigration violations. The federal government has asked that he be transferred to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody after his criminal case is complete.

The truck was attempted a U-turn in an area marked for "official use only," the highway patrol said. Video of the crash was obtained by Breaking911.

Singh was not listed in the St. Lucie County Jail. No phone number or address for Singh was listed in public records.