

Brifen Guardrail a Lifesaver

The Brifen Wire Rope Safety Fence (WRSF), a four-cable guardrail system which originated in Europe, is being monitored as an experimental feature at two sites in Colorado. The first Brifen cable guardrail was installed in May 2002 on US 285 at MP 141 – Windy Point. The second guardrail was just installed in the median on I-24 near MP 250 – at the interchange with SH 56. The guardrail at Windy Point has been hit three times since it was installed. The third time it was hit, the guardrail saved the life of Mitch Kumar, a Program Engineer from CDOT Region 5. Here is his story:

I am willing to share my story of how the Brifen WRSF on US 285 at Windy Point saved my life. Unfortunately, on Friday, February 14, 2003, I was involved in an automobile accident while driving my 1999 Isuzu Trooper. The weather conditions were dismal as I was driving from Durango to Denver. The snowy, icy roads made driving very frustrating, and the temperature was dropping steadily. I was in the left lane on US 285 north near Windy Point. One car in the right lane was parallel to me and one car was following behind me. All cars were traveling at a speed of approximately 35 MPH. The posted speed of this segment is 50 MPH. Several cars had passed me in the five miles preceding the accident site. Due to the intimidating weather conditions, I was driving cautiously and did not attempt to pass any cars.

I hit a patch of black ice and the Isuzu Trooper started to slide left. Despite my efforts to rectify the potentially dangerous situation, I could not control my SUV. Before I knew it, the SUV slid across the median and hit a car that was traveling on U.S. 285 southbound in the right lane. As I continued to slide, I hit the mountainside and bounced back across the southbound (two) lanes, the highway median, and the northbound (two) lanes. The Trooper continued to slide and hit the Brifen WRSF almost at a 90-degree angle. During the initial stage of the accident, I blacked out for approximately one minute. However, by the time my vehicle was ready to hit the Brifen WRSF cable rail I was in full consciousness and ready to die. Being an engineer and designer, I knew that this cable rail would not take the direct impact of this high center vehicle and either the cable would break or the vehicle would go over and plunge down about 500 feet. Nevertheless, the cable of this Brifen WRSF system grabbed the Trooper bumper and let it skid along the cable rail until I finally came to a stop. When I came to, I realized that I had survived because of the newly installed Brifen WRSF system

along this stretch of US 285. Both air bags had deployed and they prevented my body from sustaining any serious bodily damage.



Brifen Guardrail After Accident

Within twenty minutes, the State Patrol as well as the medical team were on the way. The paramedics could not tell if I was seriously injured or not, so they pulled me from my mangled SUV and placed my neck in a neck brace. Before I was placed on a gurney and whisked away to the hospital, I had an opportunity to look at the guardrail and at once I was filled with awe. The Brifen WRSF actually prevented my SUV from plummeting over the side; I am confident that my life was saved because of it! Being a Program Engineer with CDOT Region 5, my philosophy concerning safety issues for the traveling public has totally changed. My family and I owe CDOT and personnel involved in placing the Brifen WRSF system as an experimental project a debt of gratitude. My family and I thank all of you and CDOT for saving my life.

Congratulations to CDOT for being a forerunner in the race for safe Colorado roads/highways and for helping drivers realize that they are in secure hands. I am here today because of the Brifen WRSF on US 285.

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