

Patrol: Tour driver smoked pot days before crash



By PAUL FOY, Associated Press Writer – Wed Sep 22, 7:48 pm ET

SALT LAKE CITY – A tour bus driver smoked marijuana heavily for several days before falling asleep at the wheel and crashing in Utah, killing three Japanese tourists and injuring 11 other passengers, according to an arrest report released Wednesday.

Yasushi Mikuni, 26, was charged with 10 felony counts of negligent driving under the influence and one misdemeanor charge of having marijuana residue in his system.

Mikuni also faces misdemeanor logbook violation and unsafe lane-change charges in the rollover bus crash Aug. 9 on Interstate 15 near Cedar City.

Mikuni is a Japanese citizen who lived in Las Vegas.

He flew to Salt Lake City and drove the bus to Las Vegas before setting out the next day for a tour of national parks — with seven hours sleep, nicotine gum and energy drinks, the Utah Highway Patrol said.

"The main reason we feel this accident happened was that he was driving too many hours and didn't have enough sleep the night before," [Utah Highway Patrol Sgt. Ryan Bauer](#) told reporters in a teleconference call Wednesday from Cedar City.

Investigators don't believe Mikuni was impaired while driving, Bauer said. But Utah law doesn't allow a driver to have even a trace of an illicit drug in his or her system and "that's something he's going to have to answer for," he said.

Mikuni was arrested Monday in Cedar City after volunteering to travel from Las Vegas for an interview with investigators. That saved Utah prosecutors from having to issue an arrest warrant and extradite him from Nevada, Bauer said.

Mikuni was accompanied by his father and a brother, and they also visited the accident scene with troopers.

"It's pretty obvious he's feeling terrible about this," Bauer said.

Mikuni, who was living in Las Vegas on a work and education visa, could face up to 50 years in prison if convicted on all of the felony negligence charges. Those 10 charges stem from the deaths of three passengers and the serious injuries the accident caused seven of the other passengers.

Bauer said Mikuna had a lawyer but the sergeant didn't know the attorney's name. Jail officials said they had no record of the lawyer. None was listed on a court docket.

Mikuni, who escaped the accident with minor injuries, was driving for Canyon Transportation Inc. of the Salt Lake suburb of Sandy. He picked up the group of 14 Japanese tourists in Las Vegas for a four-day tour of Utah's national parks and Arizona's Grand Canyon, according to troopers and tour organizers.

The bus had made a stop at Zion National Park and was en route to Bryce Canyon National Park when it rolled over.

Hiroki Hayase, a 20-year-old man from Osaka, Japan, was killed in the crash, along with Junji Hoshino, 38, and his wife Junko Hoshino, 40, from Shinjuku, Japan.

Canyon Transportation declined comment, referring the AP to a Salt Lake City lawyer who wasn't available. Bauer said no charges have been filed against the Utah [bus company](#), but it faces a federal inquiry for operating across state lines without a license.

Bob Kelleher, the Utah administrator for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, has said the bus company wasn't supposed to do business outside of Utah. It typically picked up passengers from Salt Lake City's airport for short rides to ski areas, he said.

The status of that investigation wasn't immediately clear on Wednesday.

Canyon Transportation supplied the 2006 Ford E350 shuttle bus and driver to other tour operators who organized the trip. One of those organizers, Keith Griffall, CEO and co-owner of tour organizer Western Leisure Inc., has told the AP he was unaware that Canyon Transportation lacked the proper federal license.

Griffall said his company and Nippon Travel Agency in Tokyo were among several companies that helped organize or provided customers for the tour.

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