

January 22, 2014

Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
400 Seventh Street, S.W.  
Washington DC 20590

**Petition to have every vehicle equipped with an emergency window breaker**

I am petitioning the NHTSA to mandate that every vehicle be equipped with an emergency window breaker. There are many models, most weighing just ounces that could easily be installed in the center console or glove box.

In August of 2011, 45 year old Kimberly Griffith and her two daughters, Brenna age 12 and Mikaela age 8, drowned in their vehicle when a flash flood occurred on Washington Boulevard in Pittsburgh. Evidence showed they attempted to kick out the windows in their mini van. Had such a tool been accessible they would be alive today.

Just as a spare tire and jack are standard in all vehicles so should an emergency window breaker. Roll down windows are no longer the norm in todays motor cars. When water reaches the engine all power to doors and windows are lost leaving the passengers in a deadly situation. As was such the heartbreaking case of the Griffith family. Mrs. Griffith was found in the back seat with her daughters, one under each of her arms. Help arrived too late.

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## Friday's storms resulted in a day of dramatic rescues and devastating deaths

August 21, 2011 8:00 AM

By Michael A. Fuoco Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Early Saturday morning, there wasn't much physical evidence along Washington Boulevard that a flash flood fewer than 24 hours earlier had created a killing pool in which four people lost their lives.

Mud and debris from the afternoon deluge that killed a mother, two daughters and another woman had been cleared away from the road, which runs between Highland Park and Lincoln-Lemington. Blue skies replaced the coal-black of Friday afternoon. The roadway was dry.

But an unsettling silence permeated the area.

There Kimberly Griffith, 45, of Plum, and her daughters, Brenna, 12, and Mikaela, 8, had drowned in their mini-van, submerged in floodwaters so deep that would-be rescuers floating in a boat directly above it didn't know it was there.

And there also Mary Saflin, a 72-year-old Oakmont woman trying to escape the rising waters who was apparently swept into a storm catch basin -- her purse was found near it -- died as well. Ms. Saflin used her cell phone to call her daughter, telling her water was rising around her car. Her daughter told her to get out of the car and head for higher ground, the same advice 911 operators gave other motorists trapped on the highway. Ms. Saflin's phone cut off after that.

She was listed as missing but after hours of land and river searches, her body was discovered shortly before 1 p.m. Saturday, partially in the Allegheny River and partially on its southern bank, about halfway between the Highland Park and 62nd Street bridges.

Those were the names the silence spoke Saturday. For while city police, medics, firefighters,

emergency management officials had saved 15 or so lives, it was the four they couldn't rescue that they dwelt upon.

"Everyone performed admirably," a somber Police Chief Nate Harper said. "We were able to save some, but we weren't able to save all."

For those who clung to trees and street poles and stood on the roofs of their vehicles until rescued, what normally would have been a typical Friday rush hour drive on a clogged four-lane roadway became a terror trip.

"They were distraught, obviously," Raymond DeMichiei, deputy director of the Pittsburgh office of Emergency Management said of those he, police officers and medics rescued. "I mean, a lot of them came as close to dying as probably they will to the day they die. Probably that's the best way to describe it."

Mr. DeMichiei was among the first emergency responders on the scene. He had spent a long week providing oversight for the filming of "The Dark Knight Rises," so had taken off a little early and gone to his Morningside home shortly after 4 p.m. Not long after, his emergency pager began buzzing incessantly.

He hopped in his car and made it to the intersection of Allegheny River Boulevard in a few minutes. He used his own unmarked car to keep cars from turning onto Washington Boulevard.

"I was watching with binoculars, and everywhere I could see cars were floating and people were on the roofs. I counted at least seven right off the bat," he said.

At the same time, Pittsburgh police officers Tim Werner, Steve Sywyi and Robert Smolinski got civilians from a nearby marina to bring two row boats to the scene. Two of the officers got in one boat and the other officer and Mr. DeMichiei got in the other.

"The rain had pretty much stopped at that point but the water was still coming up," he said, estimating it rose in some places to as deep as 9 or 10 feet. "We didn't have a lot of trouble rowing against it, maybe because we were adrenalinized up. The water was moving but it didn't seem like a torrent that we couldn't row against it."

Mr. DiMichiei said that when he and the officer first went out on the boat they saw an older man standing in water up to his waist. They assumed he was standing on the highway.

"We went past him and I said, 'You OK?' and he said he was and I told him to stay there. We went on because there were people flopping around in the water. On our last trip back we took him into the boat."

It was only then that they realized that the man had been standing on the roof of his SUV.

In two trips, his boat rescued seven people, including one woman who was hanging onto a traffic pole where the water had reached the 35 mph sign and a man hanging on to a tree limb who told them there was a car submerged beneath them and he had tried to save the occupants.

Mr. DeMichiei radioed in that information and River Rescue officers, who had arrived and were picking up stranded motorists in their inflatable motorized boats, headed to the scene.

"When we got him off the boat he kind of got confused and wasn't sure if someone was in the car. We still proceeded as if there was a car [with occupants] there."

River Rescue officers arrived as the waters were receding and were able to get into the vehicle but it was too late. Ms. Griffith and her daughters were pronounced dead inside their vehicle at 6:10 p.m.

Mr. DeMichiei said he remembers thinking to himself when he arrived: "If somebody doesn't die here, we're going to be really, really lucky."

If only, his silence said.

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