



Office of the District Attorney Stanislaus County

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: September 28, 2022
Re: Rodrigo Joel Mendoza
Repeat drunk driver sentenced

For More Information Contact:

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Rodrigo Joel Mendoza, age 31, of Waterford was convicted on September 15, 2022, of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and was sentenced to state prison. Deputy District Attorney Kirk Brennan prosecuted the case on behalf of the People.

Over the evening of June 1, 2018, Mendoza went to a bar in Empire to drink beer and smoke marijuana. He left around 1:40 a.m. the next morning, got into his Mercedes automobile and drove east towards Waterford on Highway 132. As he was driving, Mendoza made several phone calls to his girlfriend. Minutes later, at about 1:44 a.m., he crashed into the rear of a pickup truck being driven by 45-year-old Marinus Lubbers. Mendoza did so with such force that the entire front end of his vehicle was crushed inward to such an extent it prevented him from driving further. The truck being driven by Lubbers was forced off the road where it overturned, ejecting him from the cab. Lubbers died at the scene. Mendoza fled on foot.

Responding California Highway Patrol officers began searching for Mendoza after piecing together what happened from witness statements and evidence left at the scene. When Mendoza turned up later that day, he claimed that his car had been stolen and a friend had given him a ride home because he was drunk.

Mendoza was arrested and charged with second degree murder due to his prior conviction in 2011 for driving under the influence causing great bodily injury, a felony which also counts as a "strike" under California's "Three Strikes" law. He was also charged with an enhancement for leaving the scene of a fatal crash.

Just prior to jury trial on September 12, 2022, Mendoza pled no contest before Judge Nancy Leo to one count of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and admitted the "strike" prior. He also admitted the enhancement for leaving the scene of a fatal accident.

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At a sentencing hearing on September 15th, Judge Leo ordered Mendoza to serve six years in state prison which was then doubled to 12 years under the “Three Strikes” law, plus an additional five years for leaving the scene for a total sentence of 17 years in state prison.

Mendoza is currently being housed in the Stanislaus County jail pending transportation to the Department of Corrections.

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