

## Pileup/ from A1

Janesville said Saturday it has also received some patients, but she could not immediately confirm how many. She said none were critical cases.

Both the north and southbound lanes of the interstate past Janesville were closed for about 10 hours, finally opening back up late Friday night, Gordon said Sunday.

Local emergency agencies that responded in a variety of capacities included the State Patrol; Rock County Sheriff's Office; Janesville and Beloit police departments; Janesville, Beloit, town of Beloit, town of Turtle, Milton, Footville, Evansville, Clinton, Orfordville, and Edgerton fire and EMS departments; Rockton, Illinois EMS; the Rock County Medical Examiner's Office; and the Rock County Highway Department.

In a release, the State Patrol said a severe weather event with reduced visibility due to blowing snow is believed to be the cause of the initial collision, that became a massive chain-reaction accident.

The cause remains under investigation, the State Patrol said, with more information to potentially be released later this week.

Motorists were urged by the Wisconsin State Patrol to avoid Interstate 90/39 between Janesville and Beloit Friday afternoon as emergency crews responded.

A Rock County 911 Communications Center supervisor said at about 1:30 p.m. that the Wisconsin State Patrol was shutting down all lanes on I-90/39 in both directions and diverting traffic as crews responded to a scene that involved at least one semitrailer truck on fire.

Jesus Lopez of Elgin, Illinois, found himself caught up in the wrecks while heading south on Interstate 90/39.

Heading back from Jefferson County to Elgin



PHOTOS BY ANTHONY WAHL/AWAHL@GAZETTEEXTRA.COM

Individuals carry their belongings away as emergency crews respond to a multivehicle crash in both the north and south lanes of Interstate 90/39 just north of the East Creek Road overpass on Friday afternoon.



Emergency crews respond to a multivehicle crash in both the north and south lanes of Interstate 90/39 just north of the East Creek Road overpass on Friday afternoon.

with two SUVs loaded on a trailer hitched to his Dodge Ram pickup truck, Lopez suddenly found his pickup racing toward a wall of jackknifed semitrailer trucks on both sides of the highway.

Lopez said he slammed on his brakes and had to veer off the road and down a hillside bordered by a fence to avoid slamming into the pileup that was growing before his eyes.

His truck took out a snow fence, but otherwise was undamaged, although he said he

ramped "three or four feet" into the air as he veered off the highway.

Emergency crews worked to evacuate people and then to tow away mangled semitrailer trucks and vehicles that had crashed, and in some cases had careened off the road and down overpass hillside. Tanker trucks were called to the scene, and UTVs were being brought in to reach crash victims.

A city bus was sent as a warming vehicle for those involved, who were able to walk away from the crash scene.

Emergency radio dispatches indicated at about 1:30 p.m. that "walking wounded" were making their way along the side of the snowy highway on the northbound and southbound lanes near Avalon Road.

Emergency radio traffic indicated efforts were underway to extricate multiple seriously injured people from

vehicles. Emergency responders said over radio dispatches they were evacuating multiple people with "yellow-level," or "moderate to serious" injuries.

Gazette reporters at the scene observed multiple vehicles wedged underneath jackknifed semitrailers. Reporters also observed people walking through adjacent fields away from the crash site, while others with minor damage to vehicles were able to drive away and take side-road detours.

Lopez, who stood in the embankment near where he crashed, smiling and uninjured late Friday afternoon, was one of many people who likely still had hours to wait for a towing crew to remove their vehicles. He said the SUVs he was hauling were intact despite his off-road experience.

"It's something that you kind of see on the

news in other states, so you don't think it's going to happen (here), we're Midwestern, you know?" he said.

Lopez pointed to his truck and said he considered himself lucky.

"It could have been way worse. All this stuff is material stuff. God is big, and he was here for sure."

Lopez said the chain-reaction started just south of where his truck ended up.

A Wisconsin Department of Transportation traffic camera at I-90/39 south of Woodman Road showed at 2 p.m. traffic lanes filled with emergency vehicles, semis and other vehicles involved in the crash.

A Gazette reporter on the scene at about 2:45 p.m., at a local road that goes under the interstate, East LT Townline Road, saw multiple ambulances leaving the scene appearing to be transporting crash

victims to area hospitals. On the interstate, meanwhile, multiple cars and trucks were still in the ditch and multiple semis appeared to have crashed into each other and into other vehicles, a reporter observed.

At about 3:30 p.m., a reporter counted at least 10 tow trucks working to remove wrecked vehicles over about a quarter-mile stretch of the interstate north of Philhower Road and south of East LT Townline Road. Meanwhile, over about a 50-yard stretch on the interstate, a reporter counted 21 wrecked vehicles, including multiple jackknifed and otherwise wrecked semi-trailers, and some vehicles wedged underneath semi-trailers.

Some vehicles had slid down a snowy embankment, crashing through a snow fence and into an adjacent field.



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