

## **Charges: Sheriff's deputy was on drugs during high-speed chase in Fergus Falls that turned deadly**

Kelly Backman had fentanyl in his system at the time of the chase, which ended when the suspect crashed into another vehicle, killing a married couple.

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An Otter Tail County sheriff's deputy is accused of being on drugs during an Oct. 2, 2020, [high-speed police chase](#) that ended when the suspect crashed into another vehicle, killing a married couple.

Kelly Douglas Backman, 43, of Fergus Falls, was charged Feb. 19 in Otter Tail County with misconduct of a public officer and fourth-degree DWI in connection to the chase that involved a suspect named Cody Freitag.

The chase ended with Freitag crashing into the vehicle of [Steven J. Christianson, 72, and Diane L. Christianson, 71](#), who were killed as a result.

After the crash, investigators asked Backman and fellow Deputy Michael Wing to provide a voluntary blood sample, with Wing's coming back showing no alcohol or control substances in his system, the complaint states.

Backman, however, refused to provide a voluntary blood sample. He did provide a preliminary breath test, which showed no alcohol, charges say. A blood sample was taken later, which was positive for Alprazolam, which he was prescribed, as well as 3.0 ng/mL of fentanyl and 1.7 ng/mL of nor-fentanyl.

It was determined Backman was under the influence of the synthetic opioid fentanyl at the time he was operating his squad car, the complaint says.

Investigators found some discrepancies involving Backman's work as a narcotics investigator, including him not logging drugs into evidence in two instances in August, charges say.

Meanwhile, investigators conducted a search warrant on Backman's desk and lockers, where they found a large baggie of glass pipes and grinders, a small plastic vile that appeared to be empty. In a temporary evidence locker only Beckman had access to, investigators found a Pelican-style case with burned tinfoil, a small plastic bottle with a blue lid that contained a white powdery substance and a scale.

If convicted, Beckman faces up to 90 days in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine for the DWI charge and up to one year in prison and/or a \$3,000 fine for the misconduct charge.

## The chase, subsequent crash

According to the criminal complaint, deputies Backman and Michael Wing were working the night of Oct. 2, 2020. Wing and Backman were driving separate unmarked police vehicles trying to locate and arrest Freitag, who was a fugitive wanted for felony third-degree controlled substance, fleeing in a motor vehicle and other offenses.

Backman, who was working undercover, attempted to buy controlled substances from Freitag at a convenience store in Fergus Falls as a ruse to arrest Freitag.

When he spotted Freitag pull into the parking lot, he radioed Wing, who approached the vehicle in his uniform and Freitag took off.

Freitag drove away at a "extremely high rate of speed," with Wing following him and Backman following behind Wing. Wing went to follow Freitag around a turn, but he hit a curb, which disabled his vehicle, charges state.

Backman continued with the pursuit, with his lights and siren activated. He was about 2-3 blocks behind Freitag and they were going upwards of 70-80 mph, noting Freitag was driving dangerously and wasn't stopping at stop signs.

Then, at the intersection of Cavour and Union streets, Backman saw a cloud of dust and figured Freitag had crashed. When he approached the scene, he saw Freitag crashed into the Christiansons' sedan. The pair later died in a hospital.

Meanwhile, Freitag on the ground near the passenger door of the van he had been driving, charges say.

Freitag was [charged in October](#) in connection to the warrants and police chase.