

Highway 17 blocked by overturned truck

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STAFF WRITER

A pre-dawn collision that resulted in a fuel spill on Highway 17 this morning forced the closure of that main thoroughfare connecting Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties.

The 4:23 a.m. accident occurred when a southbound double-tanker truck side-swiped a guard rail, shearing off parts of the tank and the rail, and overturning the back trailer. The tanker's 4,700 gallons of fuel spilled on the roadway south of Mt. Hermon Road in Scotts Valley.

"To my understanding, the back trailer overturned," said Officer

Larry Walton of the Aptos office of the California Highway Patrol.

As law-enforcement authorities, who formed a vehicular barricade across the highway, cleaned up the spill that inched into storm drains and nearby Carbonera Creek, representatives from environmental agencies culled waterways for signs of contamination. Caltrans, the state Department of Fish and Game, the county's environmental health department and fire crews worked at the scene.

In addition, hazardous materials teams stood poised for mobiliza-

tion as the condensed fumes from the fuel, which this morning had not been positively identified as diesel or gasoline, swirled out of the ground, their odor permeating the air.

"We're afraid of the fumes being ignited," said Officer Larry Martinez of the CHP. Crews stood downwind of the fumes, waiting for them to dissipate before approaching.

Within minutes after the fuel-truck collision shut down the highway in both directions, the closure was extended to the two frontage roads running parallel to the spill site after a truck carrying squid "jackknifed" while headed east on

El Rancho Road, Walton said. No injuries resulted from that mishap, he said.

Granite Creek Road, Highway 9, Graham Hill Road and Soquel-San Jose Road served as alternate routes for motorists traveling north and south.

Road authorities projected a noon reopening of the winding route traversed by about 50,000 vehicles daily.

"It's incredible traffic jams everywhere," Phinn said during rush hour this morning.

Spill closes Highway 17

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Mike McCollum

A fuel spill between Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley closed Highway 17 in both directions early this

morning, forcing the rerouting of the morning commute. Story on page 2.