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COURTESY CRONIN FRIED
SEKIYA KEKINA & FAIRBANKS /
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Two cars hit a flatbed truck preparing to open the Zipper Lane in February 2004, killing four people. Investigators said the cars were going at least 100 mph.

Zipper Lane worker's survivors to get \$2M

Racing is blamed for the collision that also killed three soldiers

By Mary Adamski
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The family of Mariano "Mel" Salangron will receive a \$2 million insurance settlement for his death in a fiery freeway crash caused by drivers racing on the H-1 freeway.

Both of the racing cars had been modified with parts that boosted their speed, said the family's attorney,

announced the settlement yesterday.

Three Schofield soldiers also died in the Feb. 13, 2004, crash that left Salangdron's co-worker Carl Koonce III and a fourth soldier seriously injured.

"I wish that drivers would stop racing," said a tearful Linda Salangdron. "I miss my husband." She said they would have celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in November.

"The family feels compelled to tell people to stop using the freeways as racetracks," said Kekina. "She wants to say that racing drivers need to know they are going to die, too."

Kekina displayed photographs of a nitrous oxide system found in one of the Mitsubishi Eclipse sports coupes which, when activated by pushing a button, adds a burst of speed.

Kekina said investigators determined that the cars were traveling at least 100 mph. "One driver belonged to a racing culture" documented at the speedpeople.com Internet site, he said.

The settlement will be paid by insurers for Salangdron's employer, Safety Systems Hawaii Inc. Kekina said one of the racing drivers was uninsured and the other was underinsured, contingencies covered by the company's insurance.



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Linda Salangdron cried yesterday at a news conference as she looked at photos of the crash that killed her husband, Mariano. Attorney Wayne Kekina consoled her.

Koonce and Salangdron, 49, were scouring the freeway for debris in their flatbed truck at 3 a.m. that Friday, a daily routine to prepare for opening the Zipper Lane. They were in a westbound lane near the Waipahu offramp.

Koonce, the driver, said they were traveling about 50 mph when the truck was struck from behind by the first car in an impact that "lifted up the back of the truck" and wedged the car underneath.

truck the back of the first car, and all three vehicles caught fire.

Koonce escaped through his window as the truck's gas tank burst into flames. Salangdron, 49, was trapped inside.

Army Sgt. Shanta Bridges, 26, and Spc. John Surwill, 23, died in the first car, burned beyond recognition.

Army Spc. Jason J. Bordwell, 22, driver of the second car, also died at the scene. Investigators said earlier that he had listed his 1996 Mitsubishi at an Internet site and described the modifications he had made, including lowering the suspension.

His passenger Spc. Carlos Molestina-Arteaga, 23, of Bloomfield, N.J., was pulled out of the car by a passer-by and hospitalized for burns.

Koonce returned to work for Safety Systems after he recovered from his injuries, which included a broken rib, burns and a scalp wound.

Koonce has also reached an insurance settlement, but the amount has not been disclosed, said Kekina. He was also represented by the law firm of Cronin Fried Sekiya Kekina & Fairbanks.

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