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## Cable barriers prevent some interstate accidents

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UPLAND -- The semi truck that crossed the median on Interstate 69 and killed five passengers in an oncoming van would have had to pass through a cable barrier if the accident happened 50 miles to the south.

The cables -- or wire rope safety fences -- meet federal highway standards to catch vehicles up to the size of a box van, though their manufacturer says the system has performed well on semis.

"In the U.S. we are not aware of any semis that have gotten through or over our cable system," said Steve Wells president of Brifen U.S.A. "But we do not crash test or claim that we can withhold semis."

The Indiana Department of Transportation last fall installed the Brifen high tension cables between northbound and southbound lanes of I-69 from about Pendleton south through Hamilton County and on sections of Interstate 65 north of Indianapolis.

The system, which is about three feet tall, features four three-quarter inch cables held up by steel posts and anchored at the ends into a concrete footing.

The Indiana installations are part of a test to determine whether the cable systems, which are relatively new to the U.S., are safe and cost effective, according to INDOT spokesman Will Wingfield.

The cables were installed in areas with high traffic and high rates of crossover accidents, Wingfield said.

Whether they would be expanded to more rural areas such as Grant County is undetermined.

If the cable systems are determined to be effective, it is more likely that the state would continue to install them in high-priority areas rather than blanketing every interstate corridor, Wingfield said.

The systems are not as strong as steel guardrails or concrete barriers, but they have other advantages, Wingfield said.

Cable installation costs about \$100,000 per mile for installation, about half the cost of steel guardrails and one-fifteenth the cost of concrete barriers, which must have storm sewers for drainage.

The cables, designed to absorb the energy of a vehicle crash as a kind of safety net, result in less trauma to the human body compared to a concrete or steel barrier, Wells said.

The manufacturer's U.S. Web-site, [www.brifenus.com](http://www.brifenus.com) says that 275 documented hits have resulted in only three minor injuries in the past three years.

Brifen cable systems are used in about 25 states and 30 countries, Wells said. They have been growing in popularity in the U.S. since they were first installed in Oklahoma City in 2001, he said.

Sgt. Rod Russell of the Indiana State Police said he was unsure whether the cables could have prevented the crash. But they wouldn't have hurt, he said.

"Anything that is in the median strip that can slow or stop a vehicle from going into adjacent lanes is a plus for all motorists," he said.

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