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Tackett named to probe Hermann fatal accident

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A special prosecutor will conduct an investigation into the circumstances leading up to an April 4 accident near Hermann that left seven people dead.

William M. Tackett, a Cole County assistant prosecuting attorney, was named special prosecutor Monday by Gasconade County Associate Circuit Court Judge Randolph H. Puchta, according to a spokesman in Puchta's office in Hermann.

Tackett said he would be looking into circumstances before the accident, but he declined to be specific.

"Out of fairness to everybody, let's just wait until we've had a chance to look at the facts," Tackett said.

He said he has received copies of investigation reports from the

Highway Patrol and the Division of Liquor Control.

Tackett said he would be conducting his own investigation beginning next week.

According to the judge's spokesman, Tackett was named in place of Gasconade County Prosecuting Attorney John Berkemeyer.

The spokesman said Berkemeyer requested a special prosecutor be named because he has represented 5-year-old Ashley Dile, the lone survivor of the crash, before the accident and is now representing her in connection with the accident.

Within minutes after the head-on collision, officials speculated that alcohol was a contributing factor. Test results released about a week later showed the driver of one of the cars, David Deeker, 30, St. Louis, had a blood-alcohol level of 0.30 percent. A person with a
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0.10 percent level is considered legally drunk in Missouri.

Sharp Corner Bar in Hermann was cited last week for illegally selling alcohol to Deeker and two passengers in his car. Deeker and the two passengers were killed in the accident.

According to Charles Smarr, state supervisor of liquor control, Sharp Corner was cited for three violations of the state law that prohibits the sale of alcohol to an intoxicated person. The penalties range from a temporary suspension to a permanent revocation of the establishment's liquor license.

Criminal charges, if any, will be decided by Tackett.

"The bottom line is you've got to get the facts before you can make any of these decisions," Tackett said. "These types of investigations you don't want to conduct in the press."

According to the Highway Patrol, Deeker's car was northbound in the southbound lane of Highway 19, traveling at more than 70 mph when it collided head-on with another car three miles north of Hermann.

The driver of the second car, Karen Alexander, 26, Rosebud, was killed along with her 2-year-old son, Nevada, Cheryl Christensen, 32, New Florence, and her 11-month-old son, Daniel Christensen. Ashley, daughter of Ms. Christensen, was listed in good condition at the University of Missouri-Columbia Hospital and Clinics.

Passengers in Deeker's car, Paul Lawrence, 30, and Barry Bergin, 35, both of St. Louis, also were killed in the wreck.