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## Three dead in billboard collapse

**SNELLVILLE, Georgia (CNN) --Three men died Thursday when the billboard they were constructing collapsed at a suburban Atlanta mall.**

When the 35,000-pound steel structure tumbled 35 feet to the ground at 11:55 a.m., the three men were crushed to death, said Ray Dunlap, a public information officer for the Gwinnett Police Department.

A fourth man was extracted from the debris and taken to North Fulton Hospital, his legs and pelvis crushed, but in stable condition, Dunlap said.

The bodies of the dead men remained trapped for several hours as workers sought to stabilize the mound of twisted metal before attempting to remove them.

A fifth crew member escaped injury. He had climbed down from the sign to get a part when it started to fall, said Detective Tim Colgan, public information officer for the Snellville Police Department.

"He's a very lucky man," Colgan said. "I told him there's an angel on his shoulder today."

The five men were subcontractors hired by the sign company to carry out electrical work and install slats that were to have displayed three alternating advertisements, said David Dusik, public information officer for the Gwinnett Fire Department.

Part of the sign collapsed onto a brick building that housed an insurance company and a hair dresser alongside a Texaco station.

The pole and the framework for the billboard had been erected when the structure fell. Snellville is about 25 miles east of Atlanta.

City officials said the deaths could have been prevented had a judge not ruled unconstitutional their billboard law restricting the size and locations of the ads.

The city of Snellville said in a news release the "tragic and needless loss of life" was brought about as a result of a court decision that allowed the billboard to be constructed over city objections.

Last year, U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper threw out the city's sign ordinance as unconstitutional, the city said.

"The prior ordinance, with its appropriate restrictions, would have prevented this tragedy," the city said. "City officials will cooperate with all injured parties to the fullest extent to see that justice is brought against all responsible parties."

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