

Chippewa County Sheriff's Office

Travis Hakes, Sheriff

Curt Dutton, Chief Deputy

Apple Orchard Incident – Town of Lafayette

Date: Wednesday September 18, 2024

Today, during field trip to an apple orchard in the Town of Lafayette several children along with parents and chaperones were on a wagon ride through the orchard; off of public roadways. During that time one of the wagons began to lose control going downhill, as they attempted to stop it; it abruptly overturned.

When the wagon overturned it caused multiple injuries to both children and adults. There were approximately 25 patients transported total, 22 by ambulance, and at least one by helicopter. Some patients were transported by personal vehicle. The Chippewa Sheriff's Office responded and the Chippewa County Emergency Management immediately notified the Hospital Readiness Collation of incoming patients. Due to the seamless collaboration between the our Office, Lake Hallie Police Department, Chippewa Fire District, Chippewa Falls Fire Department, Cadott EMS and Fire, Boyd EMS, Bloomer Ambulance, Eau Claire Fire and EMS, Mayo Clinic Health Systems, Chippewa County Public Health, and Chippewa County Department of Health and Human Services.

During incidents like these it is imperative that we focus on the safety of the victims, as well as reunification efforts between the children and their parents. I personally went to the scene and assisted in calming the children; as well as reuniting them with their parents.

Before I conclude, I would like to touch on one final point. Hearing that your young child was involved in a critical incident is some of the most gut-wrenching news a parent can receive, and we need to be sensitive about how the details of such situations are communicated. Furthermore, I was infuriated to see drone footage captured in an area where a medical helicopter was needed to treat a seriously injured victim. In critical incidents such as these, the media needs to work together with law enforcement and first responders to ensure sensitivity in reporting and the safety of all involved.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sheriff Travis Hakes