

## **Sinkhole opens; highway closes: I-93 in Concord shut down for hours**

*By SUSAN DOUCET / Monitor staff*

A sinkhole big enough to swallow a car on Interstate 93 north in Concord shut down the highway for hours Wednesday as state and local crews investigated the cause and tried to make repairs.

New Hampshire Department of Transportation officials said the sinkhole was 14 feet wide, 12 feet long and 20 feet deep.

"We believe a drainage pipe is to blame and the heavy rain, but we're not positive," said Dick Arcand, a DOT spokesman.

The sinkhole was in the shoulder and left lane of the highway between exits 13 and 14. The left southbound lane by the sinkhole was also closed Wednesday afternoon. The highway closure led to traffic jams in downtown Concord as cars were rerouted.

One man wasn't interested in taking a different route home, however.

Police said Thomas Richard Conner, 55, of Chichester weaved around the signs, through traffic cones and flags to get onto the closed highway. When he reached the sinkhole, he "berated" construction workers for being in his way, according to a state police press release.

Conner was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated, and a breath test revealed he had a blood alcohol content three times the legal limit of 0.08, police said.

Earlier in the day, motorists reported a "dip" in the road, which gave way to a full collapse about noon, said Bill Boynton, DOT public information officer.

"Whatever happened happened quite quickly," Boynton said.

No one was injured and no other property was damaged as a result of the sinkhole, DOT officials said.

On the highway, which was closed to vehicles between those two exits, were officials from the DOT, state police and the City of Concord. Gov. Maggie Hassan also stopped by for a look at the sinkhole Wednesday afternoon.

The highway is the DOT's responsibility, but below the highway is a pipe, which is the city's responsibility. The city's pipe is large and oval. Concord General Services Director Chip Chesley said Wednesday evening that he did not know the exact age of the pipe but that the nature of construction was typical for the late 1800s or early 1900s.

“Long story short, there’s definitely a connection there in how the sinkhole developed,” Boynton said.

Concord General Services posted a brief update on its Facebook page about 4:15 p.m.

“The City storm drain that runs under the highway is now receiving an emergency repair, since it seems that the cause of the sinkhole resulted from heavy flooding from yesterday’s rain,” the post read.

Machinery from Audley Construction, the company working on the highway bridge repair at exit 12, was called in to assist with the road repair, Boynton said.

“This is a project beyond our scope,” he said. “They’ve really done all the heavy work tonight.”

The company brought in excavators and filled the hole, he said. According to updates from the DOT, by about 6 p.m., the pipe was filled with concrete and the hole filled with gravel. Paving began about 8 p.m.

“Workers are battling daylight, heat, and fatigue,” the DOT reported in a Facebook post.

The highway was expected to reopen about 10:30 p.m., Boynton said Wednesday night. It required 256 cubic yards of fill – including 40 cubic yards of concrete – to plug the sinkhole, he said. Once filled, 7 inches of pavement, completed in multiple layers, were put down over the site.

The road will be safe to drive on, but a more permanent paving job over a longer stretch of the highway will be completed in the near future, Boynton said, adding that the area below the pavement will not need to be accessed again.

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