

Fourteen killed in cable car crash in Italy

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Three people have been arrested under suspicion of causing a cable car to crash in the northern Italian mountainside resort town of Stresa. The crash killed 14 people, including two children.

The cable car was about 300 metres from its peak when the structure's load-bearing cable snapped at the last pillar before the dock, and the emergency brakes failed to deploy. The car that was headed in the opposite direction, down the mountain, does not appear to have had any mechanical issues; however, those passengers had to disembark using the car's emergency stairs because the cable broke before the car was docked.

Italian Alpine Rescue and Speleological teams sent to search for survivors after the crash last Sunday morning found the cable car smashed to pieces, with only one survivor, a five-year-old Israeli boy, whose two-year-old brother, parents and grandparents were all killed upon impact.

Crash witness Grazia Aguzzi recounted to *La Repubblica* that, "Around 12:30 p.m., there was a loud bang, then it sounded like something was rolling, and then there was another loud bang. Finally, everything was silent." Another witness, Vanessa Rizzo, who works at Equus Valley Riding School in Stresa, told *La Repubblica*, "We heard a small bang and then we saw the cables flying on the ground. We saw the other people coming down with the other cabin: they had them come down with the stairs. When the fire department arrived, they couldn't get through because the cables were in the road."

The survivor, whose name is Eitan, was saved by the embrace of his father. He was taken to the Regina Margherita Hospital in Turin where he is being treated for very serious injuries, including cranial and thoraco-abdominal trauma, and fractures to the lower limbs. The boy is expected to recover, and yesterday doctors began waking him from a pharmacologically-induced

coma.

Lieutenant Colonel Alberto Cicognani of the Italian Carabinieri police told reporters that they arrested the owner of the company that manages the cable car service, Ferrovie Mottarone S.r.l., and the director and chief operating officer of the company that maintains the structure. This after workers and technicians interviewed by police admitted that the emergency brake system was deliberately rigged with a "fork" (spreader) on the cables to prevent the emergency brake from engaging in the event of an emergency.

Had the emergency brake been functioning, it would have prevented the disaster. The manager instructed that it be turned off because the cables were malfunctioning, and maintenance was unable to solve the problem, or only partially solved it.

The decision to disable the brakes was based on entirely mercenary calculations. The cable car had been put back into service on April 26, but was immediately plagued by recurring problems that hampered operations. An attempt was made to fix it in early May, but the brakes continued to lock repeatedly. To properly fix the problem would have required a more prolonged repair and shutdown, immediately after the reopening of business following the partial coronavirus lockdowns in the country.

The disaster is just one expression of the disastrous consequences of the profits-before-lives policy that has been pursued at large by the entire ruling class across Europe, who have worked to keep businesses open at all costs and permitted the deadly spread of the coronavirus.

Area residents expressed their grief for the families and their anger that the disaster could not have come at a worse time, as the country is still suffering economic devastation and massive loss of life caused by the criminal mismanagement of the pandemic by the Italian government.

There is also a massive show of support for the victims and rescuers on social media, with people from all over Italy posting via the La Tribuna di Stresa Facebook group and on Twitter, with the hashtags #stresa, #mottarone and #stresamottarone trending over the past 48 hours.

A message on the official Twitter account of Italy's firefighters reads. "Silence and sorrow are what is left today of the cable car tragedy in Stresa. Be strong, Eitan. Italy's firemen are all with you."

The last Italian cable car crash—the Cavalese cable car disaster, also known as the Massacre of Cermis—occurred in 1998 when a United States Marine Corps EA-6B prowler aircraft flew too low, against Italian airspace regulations, and cut the supporting cable of a cable car. The gondola hurled 80 metres to the ground, killing all 20 people on board. The Marine captain and navigator were exonerated in a military tribunal and the charges were also dropped against the other two marines.

Italians are also still reeling from the 2018 Morandi Bridge collapse in Genoa, Italy that killed 43 people and displaced an entire neighbourhood beneath it. To date, no one has been prosecuted—including the billionaire Benetton family that owns the operational license for the toll-bridge—for this entirely preventable incident.

The Verbania public prosecutor's office say they are continuing their investigations into the Stresa crash to "evaluate the possible involvement of other people," verify their initial findings, collect further evidence, and ascertain the culpability of those involved.

Further complicating matters, the region of Piedmont is in the midst of taking over the ownership of the cable car, and it is unclear what liability, if any, the regional authorities will have in this incident.

Prosecutors say that documents seized from Ferrovie Mottarone will be examined, including the reports on the 2016 overhaul of the entire structure, which by law must be transmitted to the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure for approval. They will also analyze footage from surveillance cameras, which were seized, to see who was present in the days leading up to and during the incident.

In perfunctory remarks on Sunday evening, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi—best known for his draconian austerity measures against Greece, Portugal

and Spain in the wake of the 2008 global economic crash—released a statement saying, "I learned with deep sorrow the news of the tragic accident of the Stresa-Mottarone cable car. I express condolences on behalf of the whole government to the families of the victims, with a special thought for the children who were seriously injured and their families."

In response to Draghi, Corrado Guzzetti, the brother-in-law of Vittorio Zurloni, one of those killed in the crash, told ANSA news, "You can't die taking your family to a quiet place, or fall from a bridge [a reference to the Morandi bridge collapse], the condolences of politics only make me more angry, because the responsibility for these tragedies is theirs." Zurloni, 55, died alongside his partner Elisabetta Personini, 37, and their 5-year-old son Mattia, just one month after the two were married.



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