

Widow of man killed on smart motorway to stage 'Three Billboards' protest outside police HQ

Claire Mercer claims South Yorkshire Police refusing to pursue corporate manslaughter case against Highways England

By Steve Bird

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Claire Mercer with her husband Jason, who would have celebrated his 46th birthday on Tuesday

The widow of a man who was killed on a smart motorway will mark her late husband's birthday by parading a giant billboard outside South Yorkshire Police's headquarters demanding that the force prosecutes Highways England over his death.

In a move inspired by the 2017 film "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri", Claire Mercer hopes to send a very public message to the force, which she claims is refusing to pursue a corporate manslaughter case.

Last month, [a coroner ruled](#) that the lack of a hard shoulder had contributed to the deaths of Jason Mercer, 44, and Alexandru Murgeanu, 22, after they stopped in a live lane on the M1 following a minor prang in 2019.

On Tuesday, the digital billboard will display a giant picture of Mr Mercer, explaining that he would have been celebrating his 46th birthday.

Mrs Mercer, 44 and from Rotherham, said: "Drastic times call for drastic measures. We have publicly called on South Yorkshire Police to investigate Highways England. We've had coroners back this call. I've confirmed I will take legal action against the police, and still we get nowhere.

"That's why I have hired a mobile 11 square foot digital display to ask why they are not taking this seriously."

The van carrying the billboard will drive around the Rotherham and Sheffield areas, as well as outside force headquarters.

"Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri", tells the story of a woman who rents the billboards to call attention to the unsolved rape and murder of her daughter.

Mrs Mercer's lawyers have also written to South Yorkshire's chief constable, Stephen Watson, to demand an investigation.

Her solicitor, Neil Hudgell, said: "Our client feels strongly that there is a case to answer for the offence of corporate manslaughter. The fact is that Highways England has been aware of the obvious risk of removing hard shoulders on motorways, yet has continued to expand the network.

"It has been demonstrated by statistics that the risks presented by stationary vehicles have increased by the use of smart motorways. All of these facts ought to have been known before the death of Jason."

Mrs Mercer set up the campaign group Smart Motorways Kill after the death of her husband.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/02/27/widow-smart-motorways-victim-parade-giant-billboard-outside/>