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# Coughing fit disrupts court as truck driver Kenneth Pillar faces charge of death by dangerous driving

By court reporter [Candice Marcus](#)

Updated 12 minutes ago

**A truck driver charged with causing death by dangerous driving has had a coughing fit in an Adelaide court after alleging it was another coughing fit that led to the fatal smash.**

Kenneth Laurence Pillar, 54, of Camperdown in Victoria started coughing and gasping for air as he faced the South Australian District Court.

The episode lasted several minutes and court officials assisted Pillar as he bent over and wheezed.

It is alleged the man's B-double truck crossed onto the wrong side of the Swanport Bridge at Murray Bridge, south-east of Adelaide, last June.

The driver of a car travelling in the opposite direction



**PHOTO:** Coughing in the street outside court, Kenneth Lawrence Pillar says coughing also led to a fatal crash last June. (ABC News: Candice Marcus)

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on the bridge, 61-year-old teacher Maria Dowdell, was killed.

Pillar's lawyers told an earlier hearing the truck driver had been coughing uncontrollably at the time of the fatal collision.

The man re-entered his plea of not guilty at the latest hearing and the matter was adjourned until December.

Outside court, Pillar had another coughing fit while crossing a road.

He told reporters outside the court he was sorry for the crash.

"I'm sorry. Our condolences go to the family," he said.

Asked how he was feeling, Pillar replied: "Terrible".

He also spoke about the time of the crash.

"I started coughing and blacked out," he said.

The accused man's girlfriend, Belinda Thornton, who was a passenger in the truck at the time of the crash, is charged with acts to endanger life.

Outside the latest hearing, Julian Dowdell, a son of the woman who died in the collision, said the family has faced a very difficult and traumatic time.

"We're doing our best, it's tough, it is really hard," he said.

"We're supporting each other as best we can and trying to look forward to better days, I guess."

Family members said they wanted to thank two Tailem Bend residents, Judy and Bruce Harris, who organised a floral memorial at the crash scene.

They put 61 roses on the road bridge, one for each year of the victim's life.

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**PHOTO:** [Julian Dowdell spoke of the traumatic time since his mother's death.](#) (ABC News: Candice Marcus)

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"It's such a lovely gesture from people who didn't know our mum," Ms Dowdell's daughter Kristen told reporters.



**PHOTO:** [Victim Maria Dowdell with her daughter Kristen](#). (Supplied: Dowdell family)

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