Written by MARK JAEGER
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A veteran Saukville police officer is on paid administrative leave after being charged with first-offense drunken driving following a rollover accident on Highway LL in the Town of Belgium on Jan. 15.

Jeffery Jiracek, a 14-year veteran of the department, was placed on paid leave Jan. 16 following an internal investigation of the incident, Saukville Police Chief Bill Meloy said Monday.

Jiracek, 45, of Belgium, is scheduled to appear in Ozaukee County Circuit Court on Wednesday, March 14, on the traffic offense.

The crash investigation was handled by the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department.

According to the incident report, a sheriff's squad car was dispatched to Highway LL near Cedar Beach Road at about 9:30 p.m., after a northbound Ford Explorer had crossed the center line and rolled over in a farm field.

The vehicle was found resting on its passenger side with Jiracek standing nearby. The incident report said tracks in the newly fallen snow indicated the SUV slid sideways in the wrong lane for approximately 70 feet before rolling over into the field.

The responding deputy said Jiracek appeared unsteady on his feet, had slurred speech and the odor of intoxicants on his breath, according to the report.

Jiracek was reportedly uncooperative with officers and rescue personnel at the scene before agreeing to go in an ambulance to Columbia St. Mary's Ozaukee Hospital in Mequon.

A test based on a blood sample taken at the hospital showed Jiracek had a blood-alcohol level of .18, more than twice the level the state considers as evidence of intoxication, according to a report from the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene Toxicology Section.

Investigators said Jiracek had been on duty until 6 p.m. on the night of the accident, then met a Port Washington police officer at a Port bar to watch the end of the Green Bay Packers' playoff game.

Meloy also investigated the accident and said he interviewed the bartender who served Jiracek, the other police officer and a third man.

The bartender told Meloy that Jiracek drank four or five beers and as many as five mixed drinks in less than three hours, according to the report.

The bartender said Jiracek left the bar at around 9 p.m., and was planning on meeting friends at a bar in Belgium.

Meloy said Jiracek will remain on leave until the case is resolved.

“In all my time as police chief, and I’m talking about 39 years, I’ve never faced this situation where one of my officers has been charged with operating while intoxicated,” Meloy said.

“The union contract says the officer can remain on duty or placed on paid leave, which is the way I decided to go. This is not a criminal case, but I do consider it to be a serious traffic violation.”

Meloy said keeping Jiracek off duty until the legal matter is resolved was important for the officer and the department.

“I have no problem holding officers to a higher standard of conduct. We are all people who can make mistakes, but this comes down to a question of good judgment, which is what the public has a right to expect of its police officers,” he said.

“This badge doesn’t give us any special privileges. You do everything you can to make sure you are hiring good cops, and our application form is 26 pages long followed by extensive background checks, but nobody has come up with a test yet for common sense.”

The chief said he will not make a decision about Jiracek’s future with the department until the court case is resolved.

Jiracek’s attorney, Nathan Dineen, was contacted by Ozaukee Press but refused to comment on the case