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HIGHWAY ACCIDENT REPORT

Adopted: March 28, 1989

PICKUP TRUCK/CHURCH ACTIVITY BUS
HEAD ON COLLISION AND FIRE
NEAR CARROLLTON, KENTUCKY
MAY 14, 1988

NTSB Number: HAR-89/01

NTIS Number: PB89-916201

SYNOPSIS

About 10:55 p.m. eastern daylight time on May 14, 1988, a pickup truck traveling northbound in the southbound lanes of Interstate 71 struck head-on a church activity bus traveling southbound in the left lane of the highway near Carrollton, Kentucky. As the pickup truck rotated during impact, it struck a passenger car traveling southbound in the right lane near the church bus. The church bus fuel tank was punctured during the collision sequence, and a fire ensued, engulfing the entire bus. The busdriver and 26 bus passengers were fatally injured. Thirty-four bus passengers sustained minor to critical injuries, and six bus passengers were not injured. The pickup truck driver sustained serious injuries, but neither occupant of the passenger car was injured.

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the collision between the pickup truck and the church activity bus was the alcohol-impaired condition of the pickup truck driver who, operated his vehicle opposite to the direction of traffic flow on an interstate highway. Contributing to the severity of the accident was the puncture of the bus fuel tank and ensuing fire in the bus, the partial blockage by the rear bench seats of the area leading to the rear emergency door which impeded rapid passenger egress, and the flammability of the materials in the bus seat cushions.

The safety issues discussed in the report include:

- effects of alcohol on driver performance,
- effectiveness of driving-under-the-influence program in Kentucky,
- current Federal standards used in school bus manufacture,
- flammability and toxicity of school bus seating materials,
- emergency egress on school buses, and
- fuel system integrity of school buses

Safety recommendations addressing these issues were made to the governors of all 50 State, the State of Kentucky, various private church associations and special activity groups, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the Federal Highway Administration.

Committee to implement these measures on a national basis in the most expedient manner at its command.

On January 17, 1969, FHWA responded that:

The support of State research work to develop remedial measures to avert or redirect wrong way movements at points of ingress and egress on divided highways will be continued as a regular part of FHWA program... will explore expansion of the program as recommended. The National Joint Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Division will be kept informed as recommended.

On July 17, 1975, the Safety Board classified Safety Recommendation H-68-24 as "Closed-Acceptable Action." In the past, efforts have been made to reduce wrong-way driving at entrances and exits near interchanges. However, because the loss of life (about 272 deaths per year) from wrong-way accidents continues to be substantial, it is reasonable to conclude that wrong-way accidents on the main line between interchanges may now be a problem. A nationwide effort on the interstates should be initiated to post "Wrong-Way" and "One-Way" signs and place pavement arrows at each crossover or at periodic intervals (such as 1 mile). Although there are about 43,000 miles of interstate highway, the cost may not be great relative to the benefits of reducing these severe types of accidents. However, the Board recognizes that it may be necessary to establish, through a demonstration program, the feasibility of such a program. Because wrong-way accidents do not occur frequently on a particular interstate route within a State, the Board believes the FHWA should conduct a demonstration project to determine the feasibility of reducing wrong-way accidents on the main lines of interstates by the installation of additional signs and markings at all crossovers and at periodic intervals. Based on a preliminary assessment of the data presented in table 1, North Carolina, Georgia, and Indiana may be candidates for the demonstration projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board made the following recommendations:

to the 50 States and the District of Columbia:

Propose legislation establishing a date by which school buses manufactured before April 1977 will be phased out of use for transportation of passengers. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-1)

to 49 States, except Kentucky, and the District of Columbia:

Convene or reconvene a committee or task force to review your State's driving-under-the-influence (DUI) legislation and its implementation, in light of the problems discussed in the accident report on the pickup truck/church activity bus head-on collision and fire near Carrollton, Kentucky, on May 14, 1988. Particular attention should be paid to implementation of administrative license revocation programs, elimination of plea bargaining to a nonalcohol-related offense, reduction of licensing penalties for enrolling in alcohol education or treatment programs, improved evaluations of convicted DUI offenders, and enhanced public awareness and enforcement programs. Based on this review, take appropriate action to improve your State's DUI prevention program. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-2)

to various church associations and other special activity groups:

Purchase only school bus-type vehicles which meet the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards set for school buses in April 1977. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-3)

to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

Incorporate in Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 302 the recommendations of the National Institute of Standards and Technology concerning the new material acceptance criteria to reduce the rate of fire spread in all buses. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-4)

Revise Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 217 to require that school bus egress be based on vehicle occupant capacity and be no lower than those currently required for nonschool buses. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-5)

Revise Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 301 to provide additional protection for school buses in severe crash situations based on an evaluation of the merits of relocating fuel tanks, providing additional structure to protect fuel system components, and using frangible valves in critical locations. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-6)

to the Federal Highway Administration:

Conduct a demonstration project to determine the effectiveness of installing additional signs and markings at all crossovers and periodic intervals to reduce wrong-way accidents on interstates. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-7)

to the State of Kentucky:

Enact the recommendations made by the Driving-Under-the-Influence (OUI) Committee formed by the governor to assess the current DUI laws. These recommendations cover administrative license revocation, illegal per se, implied consent and testing, chemical analysis, suspended licenses, and alcohol driver education. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-8)

Amend the current driving-under-the-influence laws to prohibit the reduction or elimination of a licensing penalty if a convicted offender enrolls in an education or treatment program. Participation in these programs should be required in addition to appropriate licensing or other penalties. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-9)

Review all aspects of the plea bargaining prohibitions of the 1984 driving-under-the-influence law to determine if persons charged with alcohol-related offenses are being allowed to plea bargain the charge to a nonalcohol-related offense, and if so, take administrative or legislative action to correct the situation. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-10)

Expand the use by the Kentucky State Police of preliminary breath test devices and the three-part field sobriety test recommended by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, including the horizontal gaze nystagmus test, and urge and assist all other traffic law enforcement agencies in Kentucky to do the same. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-11)

Expand the use of sobriety checkpoints by the Kentucky State Police, and encourage and assist local law enforcement agencies to do the same. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-12)

Renew State efforts to publicize and encourage citizens to participate in the "Report a Problem Intoxicated Driver" program. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-13)

Expand efforts to make the public aware of increased emphasis on deterring impaired driving. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-89-14)

Resources

- Press Releases
- Speeches/Testimony
- Databases
- Accident Dockets
- Training Center
- Safety Recommendations
- Strategic Plan, Performance & Accountability Reports & More
- Media Resources
- Report an Accident
- Submit a TCAS Notification

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Publications

- Accident Animations
- Accident Reports
- Annual Review of Aircraft
- Accident Data

