

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 P.M., E.D.S.T., AUGUST 15, 1975

ISSUED: August 15, 1975

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Forwarded to:

Honorable Norbert T. Tiemann  
Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Honorable Mills Godwin  
Governor  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-75-16

The Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation has set up a construction zone on Interstate 495 in Fairfax County, Virginia. On January 11, 1975, an automobile struck timber barricades which had been placed along the median within the construction zone and then struck fuel containers within the construction barricades. A fire resulted and the three occupants of the automobile were killed (see photograph). During its investigation of that accident, the National Transportation Safety Board learned of other serious accidents within the zone and discovered several hazards to motorists who drive within the zone.

Since construction activities will continue along the section of I-495 for another year or more, the Safety Board believes that hazards which exist should be eliminated. The Safety Board's investigation identified the following hazards within the construction zone:

- (1) Lane markings are too faint to see, especially at night or when the road is wet; some lane markings which are no longer current are still visible, which can confuse motorists; and the lane markings which indicate transitional lanes on the shoulders are too abrupt for the posted speed limit.
- (2) The timber barricades, which are used both as traffic barriers and road edge delineators can be knocked into the roadway by a vehicle or blown onto the roadway by the wind; the barricade rail forms a spear when it is hit by a vehicle; and when struck, the barricades are inadequate, at posted speeds, to safely redirect traffic onto the roadway.

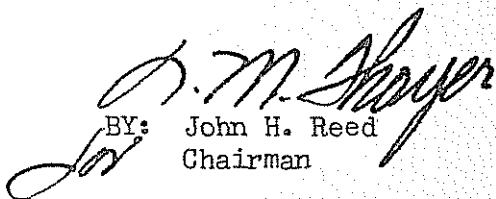
- (3) Stored materials, fuel, and equipment are not adequately protected from traffic.
- (4) Construction materials and debris have reduced the effectiveness of such safety facilities as bridge rails and guardrails. For example, construction debris piled in front of guardrails makes it possible for vehicles to vault the guardrails.
- (5) Shoulders either do not exist or are inadequate.
- (6) Hazards such as excavations and barriers are adjacent to the roadway even in areas where work is not presently being done.
- (7) When lanes are closed temporarily, traffic control procedures are poor and present hazards both to flagmen and to motorists.

In addition to specific hazards identified in the construction zone, the Safety Board investigation indicated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has not established safety standards for the design and use of temporary traffic barriers in construction zones.

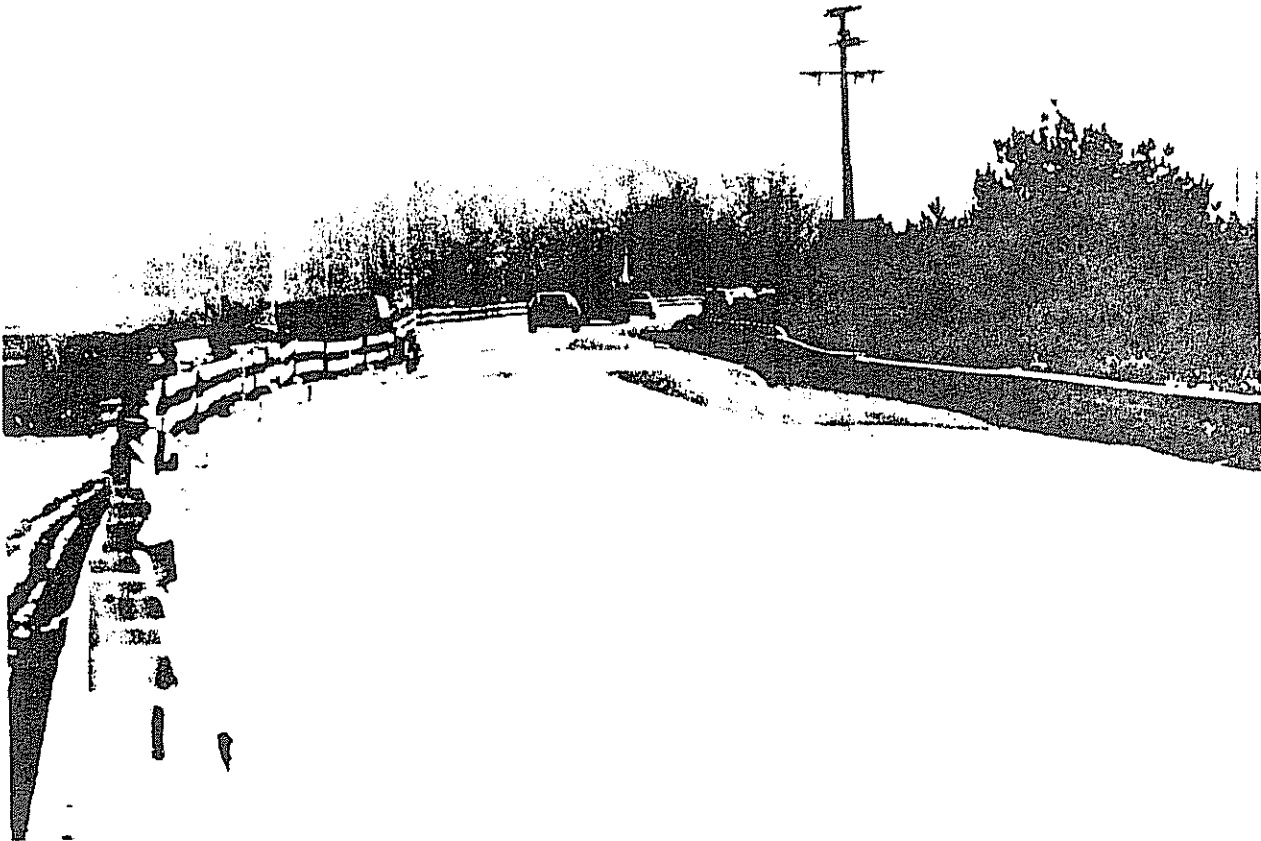
The National Transportation Safety Board, therefore, recommends that the FHWA and the State of Virginia:

Investigate the above-mentioned hazards to determine if they still exist, and, if so, take appropriate action to correct them. (CLASS I.)

McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation. REED, Chairman, did not participate.

  
BY: John H. Reed  
Chairman

THIS RECOMMENDATION WILL BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE ISSUE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. NO PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE MADE BEFORE THAT DATE.



Transition site at Interstate 495 and Backlick Road where a fatal accident occurred on January 11, 1975. This photo illustrates typical hazards of timber barricades inadequate to redirect traffic when struck and lane markings still visible though no longer current. This photo does not represent visual conditions at the time of the accident.

