

Log H-354

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: February 24, 1983

Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-83-5 and 6

About 9:30 p.m., on October 6, 1982, a U-HAUL rental truck was traveling southbound on U.S. Route 29-A near Lynchburg, Virginia. The truck cab was occupied by a driver and 1 passenger, and 64 passengers were riding in the enclosed 24-foot-long, 7-foot-wide rear cargo area of the truck. The truck occupants were members and potential members of the Sigma Chi fraternity of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. They were en route to a party being held at the Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, about 60 miles south of Charlottesville. About half of the cargo area passengers were standing on the floor of the truck, 22 to 24 of the cargo area passengers were standing on 1-foot-high picnic benches that had been placed along each side of the truck, and 6 passengers were sitting in a rear storage compartment that projected over the truck cab roof. As the driver was maneuvering the truck down a relatively steep grade and through a relatively sharp right-hand curve ^{1/} in a posted 35-mph speed zone, the truck traveled across the centerline and tipped over onto a Volkswagen "Beetle." Two truck cargo area passengers were killed, and 49 truck cargo area passengers and the Volkswagen driver were injured. The truck driver and the truck cab passenger were not injured.

A large 4-inch by 7-inch warning label that was prominently displayed on the U-HAUL truck cab instrument panel read: "NO PASSENGERS ALLOWED IN REAR — Passengers in Rear Area (Cargo Area) Risk Injury Due to Shifting Cargo, Impact Ejection, And Lack of Collision Protection." The high number of injuries and loss of life to truck cargo area passengers in this accident illustrates why such warnings have been established. In addition, because most of the cargo area passengers were riding in standing or elevated positions, the truck's center of gravity was raised and the truck was made more susceptible to tipping over. This factor increases the need to prohibit the transportation of passengers in nonpassenger, cargo areas of vehicles.

After the rental truck accident, the Inter-Fraternity Council of the University of Virginia banned the use of nonpassenger vehicles for carrying fraternity men to or from offcampus events. The Safety Board commends the Council for such action, but the Board also believes that further action is necessary. It was the opinion of the University of Virginia Dean of Students that more accidents and injuries occurred when trips to

^{1/} The grade was 4.8 percent, and the curve radius was 286 feet.

offcampus social events were made in automobiles that were owned and operated by members of the student group being transported, as was the practice before fraternities at the school began to use rental trucks for such transportation. When death rates are compared, automobile travel is about 7 1/2 times more hazardous than group travel by any type of bus and over 100 times more hazardous than traveling on a commercial, intercity bus. 2/ And, since offcampus social events often include the consumption of alcohol, there is a high probability that drivers who are members of the student groups participating in the events will drink at such events, along with the nondriving members. These drinking drivers further increase the risk of being involved in a serious accident.

As a matter of fact, the driver of the rental truck involved in this accident was a member of the student group being transported. He was tested for alcohol impairment at the accident scene, and a portable breath analyzer reading of 0.08 percent alcohol by weight was obtained. 3/ The relative accuracy of the portable breath analyzer and the influence of alcohol as it affected this driver's loss of vehicle control has not yet been determined by the Safety Board in its investigation of this accident. However, the fact that this driver was drinking illustrates why there is a need to discourage the use of drivers who are members of the student groups being transported, in order to reduce the possibility that drivers transporting these groups will drink and then drive.

Many colleges have buses with trained drivers that can be made available to student groups. Commercial buses can also be chartered for these events. Although buses are expensive to rent, the Safety Board believes that their use should be encouraged in traveling to and from offcampus social events where the consumption of alcohol is likely to occur.

The Safety Board believes that the potential for another serious similar accident involving an inappropriate vehicle or a drinking driver can be reduced if student groups are made aware of accidents of this type and proper transportation policies are established. Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges join with 16 other similar associations (list enclosed) that will receive this letter and:

Advise your members of the circumstances of this accident. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-5)

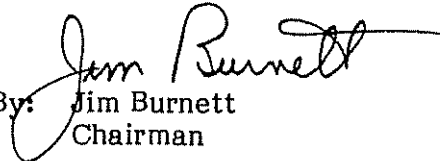
Urge your members to establish a policy for the transportation of student groups to and from offcampus events that would: (1) prohibit the use of trucks and other nonpassenger-carrying vehicles, (2) discourage the use of drivers who are members of the student group being transported, and (3) advocate the use of buses and trained, for-hire drivers. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-6)

2/ "Accident Facts," National Safety Council, 1981 Edition.

3/ According to Section 18.2 269 of the Code of Virginia, if a driver's blood alcohol level is 0.10 percent or more by weight or volume of alcohol, the driver is considered under the influence of alcoholic intoxicants. If the driver's blood alcohol level is more than 0.05 percent but less than 0.10 percent by weight or volume of alcohol, such a fact may be considered with other competent evidence in determining whether the driver is under the influence of alcoholic intoxicants.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "...to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations." (P.L. 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, we would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: Jim Burnett
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Enclosure



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