



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

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**Date:** April 27, 2005

**In reply refer to:** H-05-09

Mr. Stephen F. Campbell  
Executive Director  
Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance  
1101 17th Street, N.W., Suite 803  
Washington, D.C. 20036

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The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating transportation accidents, determining their probable cause, and making recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. We are providing the following information to urge your organization to take action on the safety recommendation in this letter. The Safety Board is vitally interested in this recommendation because it is designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

The recommendation addresses the identification and appropriate use of speed-restricted tires on motorcoaches. The recommendation is derived from the Safety Board's investigation of the motorcoach run-off-the-road accident that took place in Tallulah, Louisiana, on October 13, 2003,<sup>1</sup> and is consistent with the evidence we found and the analysis we performed. As a result of this investigation, the Safety Board has issued 11 safety recommendations, 1 of which is addressed to the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA). Information supporting this recommendation is discussed below. The Safety Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days addressing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement our recommendation.

At 10:50 a.m. on October 13, 2003, a 1992 Neoplan USA Corporation 49-passenger motorcoach, owned and operated by the First Baptist Church of Eldorado, Texas, was traveling eastbound on Interstate 20 near Tallulah, Louisiana. The motorcoach, carrying 14 passengers, was en route from Shreveport, Louisiana, to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as part of a multicity sightseeing tour that had originated in Eldorado. As the motorcoach approached milepost 168, it drifted rightward from the travel lanes and onto the shoulder, where it struck the rear of a 1988 Peterbilt tractor semitrailer operated by Alpha Trucking, Inc., which was stopped on the shoulder at milepost 167.9. As both vehicles moved forward, the motorcoach rotated clockwise slightly and the semitrailer rotated counter-clockwise slightly; the vehicles remained together. They traveled approximately 62 feet and came to rest, still oriented to the east, adjacent to the right side of the interstate on the outside shoulder. Eight motorcoach passengers sustained fatal

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information read National Transportation Safety Board, *Motorcoach Run-Off-The-Road Accident, Tallulah, Louisiana, October 13, 2003*, Highway Accident Report NTSB/HAR-05/01 (Washington, DC: 2005).

injuries, the motorcoach driver and six passengers received serious injuries, and the Peterbilt driver was not injured.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the accident was the motorcoach driver's operation of the motorcoach in a reduced state of alertness due to fatigue as a result of his chronic insomnia and poor quality sleep. Further contributing to the accident was the failure of Alpha Trucking, Inc., to perform vehicle maintenance and to provide safety management controls, which resulted in the accident tractor semitrailer being parked on the interstate shoulder. Contributing to the severity of the injuries was the failure of the motorcoach seat anchorages.

The postaccident mechanical inspection of the motorcoach by Safety Board investigators did not reveal any mechanical conditions that would have contributed to the accident. However, during the vehicle inspection, investigators discovered that the motorcoach had been equipped with speed-limited tires. The restricted speed information was clearly visible on the tires' outer sidewalls. The tires were designed for use at speeds not to exceed 55 mph; the motorcoach was being operated on the interstate at speeds exceeding 55 mph at the time of the accident. According to the manufacturer, the tires' speed restriction was dictated by their construction. They were designed to provide high-load capacity and durability and are normally (and appropriately) used on inner city transit-bus-type vehicles, which typically do not exceed speeds of 55 mph. The use of speed-limited tires on vehicles that routinely operate at higher speeds is not an industry-recommended practice because of the propensity of this type of tire to generate excessive heat, which is the leading cause of abrupt tire failures.

The First Baptist Church of Eldorado had the tires installed on the accident motorcoach in February 2002 and, on June 26, 2003, the motorcoach passed a State of Texas inspection. The inspection of motor vehicles (including motorcoaches) in Texas is conducted in approved, privately owned and operated garages and repair facilities, which are designated by the Texas Department of Public Safety. A review of the State inspection manual revealed that the inspection procedures do not include instructions concerning the identification and proper use of speed-limited tires. The Safety Board also reviewed additional State and Federal regulatory and vehicle inspection guidelines.<sup>2</sup> Information concerning the identification of, or the procedures for ensuring the proper use of, speed-limited tires does not appear in any of these State and Federal inspection guidelines or regulations for private or commercial vehicles.

If a speed-restricted tire is used in service at speeds above 55 mph for extended periods, a catastrophic failure can result. Consequently, when passenger-carrying vehicles are equipped with such tires, the vehicles must not be used for highway travel. Without specific inspection criteria addressing this issue, these tires can escape inspectors' scrutiny and be permitted to remain on passenger vehicles intended for prolonged use at speeds above 55 mph, which would cause an unsafe situation. The Safety Board concluded that because the commercial vehicle inspection criteria used by the State of Texas, the CVSA, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators do not address

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<sup>2</sup> The guidance documents reviewed included 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 393; the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations appendix G to subchapter B, *Minimum Periodic Inspection Standards*; the CVSA *North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria*; and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators *Vehicle Inspection Handbook: Trucks, Buses, and Trailers*.

the identification and appropriate use of speed-limited tires, they overlook an important vehicle safety factor and can result in commercial vehicles intended for highway use being operated with tires not suited for highway speeds.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board makes the following safety recommendation to the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance:

Revise the *North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria* to provide guidance on inspecting and examining tires to ensure that they have the proper speed rating for a vehicle's intended use. (H-05-09)

The Safety Board also issued safety recommendations to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, and Neoplan USA Corporation.

In your response to the recommendation in this letter, please refer to H-05-09. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6177.

Acting Chairman ROSENKER and Members ENGLEMAN CONNERS, HEALING, and HERSMAN concurred in this recommendation.

By: Mark V. Rosenker  
Acting Chairman