



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Safety Recommendation

**Date:** September 16, 1986

**In reply refer to:** H-86-70

Mr. B. K. Cooper  
Chief Engineer  
Arkansas State Highway and  
Transportation Department  
Post Office Box 2261  
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About 7:51 p.m. on June 21, 1985, a privately-owned 70,000-pound tractor-semitrailer operating in interstate commerce under a trip-lease agreement with C. Maxwell Trucking Company, Inc., lost control while descending a steep 3,439-foot grade on southbound State Route (SR) 59 in downtown Van Buren, Arkansas. The truck collided with the rear of and overrode a station wagon which was stopped at the bottom of the hill. The truck and the station wagon continued 84 feet forward, across an intersection, up a curb, and through a guardrail. They then traveled another 22 feet and struck two commercial buildings. A fire ensued and engulfed both vehicles and three buildings. Both occupants in the truck and the seven occupants in the station wagon were fatally injured. 1/

The left curve sign, the 30-mph speed limit signs, and highway regulatory signs which prohibited truck traffic on southbound SR 59 were clearly visible. Although the regulatory sign at the deceleration ramp from Interstate 40 (I-40) onto SR 59 had been removed temporarily by a sewer construction crew, the truckdriver should have responded to signs posted on I-40 before the hillcrest by pulling off the roadway and turning around to avoid descending the grade.

It is possible that the truckdriver either failed to see the available regulatory signs due to the effects of alcohol in his system, or that he purposely disregarded the signs at the top of the hill that prohibited trucks on southbound SR 59. However, the removal of the regulatory sign on SR 59 just south of the I-40 ramp prohibiting truck traffic on SR 59 might have been a factor in this accident. The location of the sign was significant because the truckdriver would have had to stop, or at least slow down, before turning right onto southbound SR 59, and he would have had time to recognize and react to the hazard ahead. The sign was 1.2 miles in advance of the hill, and several pulloff or turnaround areas were available. Safety Board investigators examined the construction permit and determined that there were no specific provisions for maintaining in-place highway signs during construction. The Board believes that the proper maintenance of signs and traffic control devices is essential, especially during road construction.

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report--"Tractor-Semitrailer/Station Wagon Runaway, Collision, and Fire, Van Buren, Arkansas, June 21, 1985" (NTSB/HAR-86/03).

The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (ASHTD) is considering changes in future highway-related construction utility permits which may include provisions requiring adequate traffic control during periods of construction. In this regard, the Safety Board urges that, for future project specifications and permits, the ASHTD specifically require the maintenance of all traffic signs unless removal is approved by the responsible government traffic engineer.

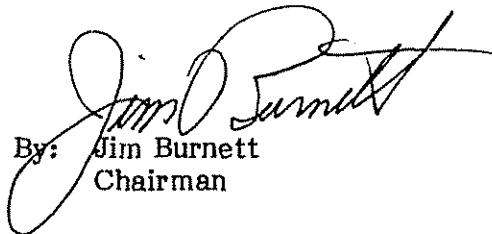
Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department:

Provide specific language in work permit specifications that require contractors to maintain highway regulatory signing along roadsides while construction activities are going on. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-70)

Also, the Safety Board made Safety Recommendations H-86-65 through -67 to the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety, H-86-68 and -69 to the Federal Highway Administration, and H-86-71 to the Governors of the States of Alaska, Florida, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming.

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" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-86-70 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman