

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 24, 1984

Forwarded to:

Governors of Nevada, Georgia, North
Carolina, South Carolina, Kansas and
Minnesota, and Washington

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-84-70

About 7:40 p.m., central standard time, on December 23, 1983, a southbound church bus (bus) suddenly veered leftward, crossed the centerline of State Route 61, a 2-lane, 2-way highway, and struck head on a northbound tractor cargo tank semitrailer near Devers, Texas. The tractor cargo tank semitrailer penetrated from 5.5 to 6.5 feet into the passenger compartment of the 1970 former schoolbus. The busdriver and all 21 passengers aboard were ejected through the front opening created in the collision. The truckdriver, the busdriver, and eight bus passengers were killed. Thirteen other bus passengers were injured. 1/

The Safety Board has investigated at least 10 catastrophic accidents from 1974 to 1984 involving unregulated private activity buses not engaged in "for hire" operations. Seven of the 10 accidents involved church buses. These accidents included head-on collisions, rollovers and overturns, and railroad/highway grade crossing impacts; these collectively resulted in 56 fatalities and 199 injuries. In the 10 accidents, most of the buses were at least 9 years old, had a seating capacity of more than 16 passengers, were originally manufactured as schoolbuses, and had been purchased used. The data compiled from these accidents are not statistically significant, but do point out certain commonalities that exist in all of these accidents.

In June 1984, the Safety Board conducted a survey of States to determine what requirements were applicable to private activity buses. The Safety Board was particularly interested in those States where the Safety Board had investigated similar bus accidents. A total of 50 States and the District of Columbia were surveyed by telephone. Information was obtained from State officials in the State Department of Transportation, Department of Public Safety, State Highway Patrol, or Motor Vehicle Administration.

The survey indicated that 28 of the 50 States and the District of Columbia had special licensing requirements applicable to private activity bus operators. The minimum age required to obtain appropriate licenses in all 50 States varied from 15 to 18. At least seven States required medical certification by a licensed physician for applicants applying for special bus licenses.

1/ For more detailed information read: Highway Accident Report—"Church Bus/Tractor-Cargo Tank Semitrailer Collision on State Route 61 Near Devers, Texas, December 23, 1983" (NTSB/HAR-84/06).

Two apparent irregularities were observed in the data for special licensing requirements. Twenty-one of the 28 States and the District of Columbia required applicants to take road tests to demonstrate their driving skills in the type of vehicle they intended to operate. Seven 2/ of the 28 States with special licensing requirements for buses did not require prospective operators to take a road test in an appropriate sized vehicle. Many activity buses are engaged in interstate travel, but are not subject to any Federal driver qualifications.

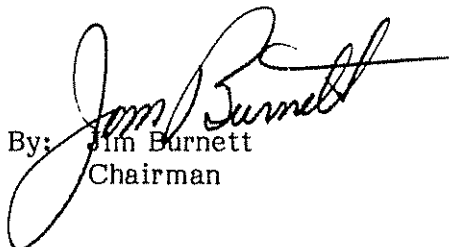
It is important that all activity busdrivers are familiar with the operation of their vehicles and have demonstrated their skills during the driver licensing process. Many activity buses engage in interstate travel, but are not subject to any Federal licensing or driver qualification requirements. Activity busdrivers are just as responsible for the safety of their passengers as commercial or schoolbus operators and should be subject to the same State licensing requirements. All States impose licensing requirements on "for hire" commercial busdrivers, such as medical certifications, road tests, and a minimum age. States should either extend these requirements to include the "not for hire" busdrivers or require all prospective busdrivers to demonstrate their knowledge of these vehicles by taking an appropriate written examination and a road test in the size vehicle they are to be licensed to operate.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends to the Governors of Nevada, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kansas, Minnesota, and Washington:

Revise current State motor vehicle licensing procedures to require all applicants for commercial or noncommercial bus licenses to take an appropriate written examination and a road test in the size vehicle for which the license is to be issued. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-84-70)

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 the Board would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and GROSE, Member, concurred in this recommendation. BURSLEY, Member, did not participate.

By: 
Jim Burnett
Chairman

2/ Nevada, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Minnesota, Kansas, and Washington.