

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-84-94 and -95

About 8:40 a.m., central daylight time, on July 5, 1984, a northbound tractor-semitrailer jackknifed and struck a southbound patrol car on two-lane U. S. Route 71 about 1 mile south of Ashdown, Arkansas. The patrol car was destroyed, and the four police officers inside were killed. The truck was damaged moderately; the truckdriver was injured. 1/

A blood sample was taken from the truckdriver at 9:50 a.m. The 3 ml of blood was taken according to good medical practice without the use of alcohol for a disinfectant and was placed in a gray-top tube. The tube contained an anticoagulant and sodium fluoride to prevent bacterial growth. The blood sample was given immediately to an Ashdown police officer to be delivered to the Arkansas State Police investigating officer. This transfer did not take place until 10:30 a.m. The investigating officer also received a blood sample at approximately 11:30 a.m. taken from the deceased officer who operated the patrol car involved in the accident. The investigating officer had the samples in his possession until 8:30 p.m. while he was investigating the accident. The samples were either in his pocket or on the front seat of his police vehicle during the day. Sometimes the samples were in an air-conditioned environment and sometimes they were exposed to the outside temperature, which reached about 80° F during the day. Both samples apparently were handled and maintained under the same conditions. At 8:30 p.m., both samples were placed in a refrigerator at the Hope, Arkansas State Patrol Troop Headquarters. At about 10:30 a.m. on July 6, 1984, another officer of the Arkansas State Police removed the blood samples from the refrigerator and delivered them to the State crime laboratory in Little Rock. The laboratory records show that the samples were received at 12:54 p.m. on July 6.

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report—"Collision of DeQueen, Arkansas, Police Department Patrol Car and Terrell Trucking, Inc., Tractor-Semitrailer, U.S. Route 71, Ashdown, Arkansas, July 5, 1984" (NTSB/HAR-84/07).

While the sample was not analyzed for 27 hours after the drawing of the blood, the sample was preserved with sodium fluoride to prevent microbial growth. The delay in the analysis of the sample was not critical since the sample was adequately preserved. The fact that the sample was not refrigerated for the entire time until measurement does not appear to have had an effect on the results in this case. The analytical results confirmed the integrity of the sample. However, since the sample was perishable and was in a breakable container, it was poor practice to carry the blood sample around during an investigation. The practice of carrying around a blood sample during the day's routine apparently is not an unusual practice by police officers in other jurisdictions.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Arkansas State Police and the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory:

Instruct State Police officers to request that two separate vials of blood containing 5 ml each be collected for alcohol and drug analysis in serious and fatal accident investigations and that the samples be refrigerated until they can be transported to a laboratory for analysis and not be held in an officer's possession except for direct transportation to the laboratory. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-84-94)

Provide State Police officers with commercially available blood collection kits which contain the necessary materials for drawing blood under sterile conditions, two sterile containers for the blood samples that are precharged with an appropriate preservative and anticoagulant, and labels for identifying the samples. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-84-95)

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 recommendations in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY, Member, concurred in these recommendations.

By: Jim Burnett
Chairman

Patricia A. Goldman
for