

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

SP-20

Roy H-437A

ISSUED: March 22, 1985

Forwarded to:

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Associate Director  
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Virginia Department of Education  
Post Office Box 6Q  
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-85-7

About 3:25 p.m. on April 12, 1984, a westbound Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company freight train traveling about 49 mph struck the front right side of a northbound 1980 Isle of Wight County schoolbus stopped at a railroad grade crossing on State Route 615 near Carrsville, Virginia. The weather was clear, the sun was to the schoolbus driver's left, and the train's whistle and bell were sounding before the collision. There were crossbucks on both sides of the single track crossing. The driver's sight distance in the direction of the approaching train was about 1/3 of a mile. The 64-passenger schoolbus body separated from the chassis at impact, rotated counterclockwise 180 degrees, rolled over 270 degrees to the right, and came to rest on its left side about 80 feet southwest of the crossing. Of the 26 school-aged bus passengers, two were injured seriously, one had moderate injuries, and the other 23 sustained minor injuries. The busdriver was seriously injured and died 5 days after the accident. The traincrew was not injured. 1/

Medical records indicated that the schoolbus driver was treated for a bleeding ulcer in April 1983. However, the attending physician stated that, in fact, she was treated for salmonella (food poisoning). These records also showed that the driver was hospitalized between May 11, 1983, and June 1, 1983, after taking an overdose of drugs in what she stated was a suicide attempt she attributed to marital discord. The driver was diagnosed as suffering from major depression with an underlying dysthmic disorder. She undertook outpatient psychiatric treatment but discontinued it in August 1983. It was reported that this treatment was discontinued because the driver and her husband had determined that it was no longer needed.

The driver's most recent annual physical examination required by Virginia for schoolbus drivers was performed on August 22, 1983. The text of the medical certificate prescribed by the Board of Education, according to Section 22.1-178 of the Code of Virginia, declared that the schoolbus driver has been examined and was found to be physically and mentally capable of operating a schoolbus safely. The examining physician, who also had treated the driver for food poisoning in April 1983, stated that he was not aware of the driver's suicide attempt and subsequent hospitalization in May 1983.

1/ For more detailed information, read: Highway Accident Report—Collision of Isle of Wight County, Virginia, Schoolbus with Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company Freight Train, State Route 615, Near Carrsville, Virginia, April 12, 1984. (NTSB/HAR-85/02)

274/860

To operate a schoolbus in the Commonwealth of Virginia, a driver must obtain a valid operator's or chauffeur's license with an "S" (schoolbus) endorsement from the Virginia Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV). To obtain an operator's or chauffeur's license with no restrictions as to the time of day driving is permitted, an applicant must pass a vision test requiring at least 20/40 (Snellen) corrected vision in one or both eyes and 100° of horizontal vision in one or both eyes. In addition, an applicant must pass a written test of the rules of the road, have no medical condition likely to interfere with safe driving, and not be currently adjudged to be legally incompetent or mentally ill.

In addition to obtaining the "S" endorsement on the operator's or chauffeur's license, a schoolbus driver applicant must take the annual physical examination required by Section 22.1-178 of the Code of Virginia, as amended. According to a representative of the Virginia Board of Education, the Code was amended in 1979 to provide for a physical examination of a "scope prescribed by the Virginia Board of Education with the advice of the Medical Society of Virginia." This 1979 amendment to the Virginia Code deleted certain specific minimum physical requirements, relating to such items as eyesight and hearing, for schoolbus drivers which this section formerly contained. The Virginia Board of Education advised that as yet it has not consulted with the Virginia Medical Society to develop minimum physical standards for schoolbus drivers, and that there are no minimum physical requirements beyond those necessary to obtain an operator's or chauffeur's license. The Safety Board believes that the lack of objective physical standards for schoolbus drivers can result in drivers with serious physical impairments being permitted to operate schoolbuses. For example, since Virginia permits the licensing of drivers who are deaf, a deaf driver with an "S" endorsement on his or her license can pass the annual schoolbus physical examination based solely on the opinion of the examining physician.

The Safety Board believes that the Virginia Board of Education, with the advice of the Virginia Medical Society, should promulgate without delay objective minimum physical standards for schoolbus drivers. Since examining physicians may or may not be aware of the demands made upon schoolbus drivers, the minimum standards should be preprinted on any form approved by the Board of Education so that these standards are readily available to the examining physician. The Safety Board also believes that examining physicians should obtain a health history from a schoolbus driver applicant to make more informed judgements of the medical and psychological condition of a prospective schoolbus driver.

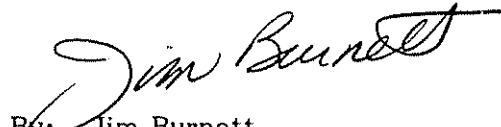
As a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Virginia Department of Education:

Consult without delay with the Virginia Medical Society to promulgate objective minimum physical standards for schoolbus drivers as specified by Section 22.1-178 of the Code of Virginia, as amended in 1979. Incorporate the standards in the prescribed physical examination forms, and specify the health history that medical examiners shall obtain when examining schoolbus driver applicants. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-85-7)

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.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY, Member, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman

