

Log I-72

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 25, 1985

Forwarded to:

Honorable Richard D. Lamm
Governor, State of Colorado
State Capitol
Denver, Colorado

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

I-85-01

About 4:50 a.m., mountain daylight time, on August 1, 1984, a tractor-semitrailer combination operated by Riss International of Kansas City, Missouri, failed to negotiate a curve and overturned on a ramp connection from southbound Interstate 25 (I-25) to eastbound Interstate 70 (I-70) near a mixed industrial and residential area in Denver, Colorado. The flat bed semitrailer was loaded with six torpedoes owned by the Department of Defense (DOD) which were being shipped from a U.S. Navy facility in Keyport, Washington, to one in Groton, Connecticut. The shipping papers described the torpedoes as Class A explosives and the weight of the shipment as 27,354 pounds.

Following the accident, out of concern for its possible consequences, four blocks of residential housing were evacuated and both I-70 and I-25 were closed in all directions for a period spanning the morning rush hour. The truck was uprighted by 11:45 a.m. The highways were opened and the residents were allowed to return to their homes about 1:10 p.m.

The drivers left Keyport on July 30 and headed east following a route given to them by Riss. The route assigned to traverse the State of Colorado was south on U.S. 287 to Colorado 14, east to I-25, south to I-70, and then east on I-70 to Kansas. Riss dispatchers use an internal document that lists routes on which hazardous materials are restricted and safe havens ^{1/} to route its trucks across the country.

When the Riss driver stopped at the Colorado port of entry at Fort Collins, the port officer noticed the hazardous material placards on the vehicle. As is the standard practice at the port of entry, the port officer wrote on the weigh ticket a routing that would have taken the driver around the City of Denver using I-76 and I-270 to I-70 east. While there has been some suggestion that this route was listed because of a program to divert truck traffic, especially hazardous material truck traffic, from the central Denver area, it also appears the listing may have had no relationship to the cargo. In any event, the port officer had no statutory authority to require the driver to follow a recommended route. The port officer did not call the driver's attention to the route listed on the ticket. As was the driver's common practice, he placed the ticket in his permit folder. He denied looking at it.

^{1/} An area designated by a jurisdiction as one where trucks carrying Class A or Class B explosives may be left unattended.

The I-25/I-70 interchange where the accident occurred is on a highway route approved by the Denver Department of Public Works for "all vehicles including those transporting Hazardous Materials." The interchange has been the site of many accidents and is presently being studied to determine the feasibility of rehabilitation. A 1966 Denver ordinance authorized designation of routes for moving hazardous flammable materials within the city which led to the publication of a route map. Later editions of the maps, however, did not limit the applicability of the routes to shipment of flammable hazardous materials. Denver's authority to designate the routes for hazardous material is limited to routes within its boundaries. Alternate routes and by-passes are available to route trucks transporting hazardous materials around the I-25/I-70 interchange and away from the central Denver area.

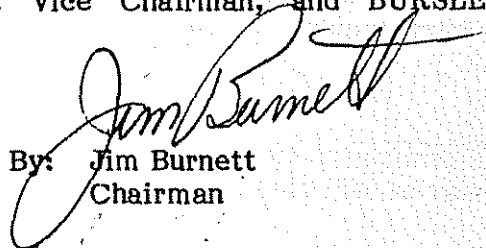
A U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regulation recognizes the right of state and local governments to determine the need for and to designate hazardous material routes within their jurisdictions. Title 49 CFR 397.3 states that "every motor vehicle containing hazardous materials must be driven and parked in compliance with the laws, ordinances, and regulations of the jurisdiction in which it is being operated. . ." As an aid to state and local governments desiring to establish hazardous material routes, DOT published "Guidelines for Applying Criteria to Designated Routes for Transporting Hazardous Materials." Some of the listed criteria to be applied in selecting designated routes include population density, route characteristics, special populations, and emergency response capabilities.

Although the investigation of this accident is continuing, the Safety Board has concluded that there is a need for coordinated action by the various jurisdictions in Colorado to establish routes for transporting hazardous materials routes within the state which takes into account the safety needs of the affected local jurisdictions. The State of Colorado has yet to establish designated routes for the highway transportation of hazardous materials on a general basis although it has acted to prohibit their transportation through the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel about 50 miles west of the accident site on Interstate 70. The Board believes that in Colorado the safest routing for the transportation of hazardous materials can best be developed at the state-level of government. Concerns and problems of local jurisdictions can be coordinated at this level to assure that preferred routes are selected to minimize the population at risk and with due regard to the level of preparedness of local jurisdictions to handle emergency situations.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the State of Colorado:

Develop and put into effect a comprehensive program in cooperation with municipal and county jurisdictions for designating safe, practical highway routes for the transportation of hazardous materials within the State of Colorado, using as a guideline the Federal Highway Administration's "Guideline for Applying Criteria to Designated Routes for Transporting Hazardous Materials." (Class II, Priority Action) (I-85-01)

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

By: 
Chairman