

Log H-346

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD**  
**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

ISSUED: October 5, 1982

Forwarded to:

Mr. William M. Ross  
President  
Claiborne County Board of  
Supervisors  
P.O. Box 339  
Port Gibson, Mississippi 39150

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-82-39

About 7:25 a.m., on December 17, 1981, the driver of a 16-passenger Head Start school van, traveling southbound on a two-lane dirt road near Hermanville, Mississippi, lost control of the vehicle and ran off the right side of a one-lane wooden bridge. The roadway condition on the approach to the bridge was muddy as a result of rain, and there was a light rain at the time of the accident. The van fell about 9 1/2 feet onto a creek embankment and came to rest on its right side. A fire developed in the front engine compartment and, after burning for 11 to 13 minutes, spread through the interior of the van. Five of the 32 occupants of the van were killed and 11 persons were injured. 1/

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the driver to stop and align the van with the bridge in the presence of adverse weather conditions and an exaggerated steering maneuver that was further aggravated by the van tires striking the sides of the bridge running boards. Other difficult maneuvering conditions confronting the driver included a downgrade; a relatively sharp, unbanked curve leading to the bridge; a "bump" at the bridge; and a narrow 8 1/2-foot defined lane width across the bridge. The driver was familiar with the bridge but had not had special driver training. Because of the driver's failure to align the van with the bridge and the consequences of her later steering maneuver, guardrails or similar barriers would have been necessary to contain the van on the bridge and reduce the severity of the accident. However, the bridge did not have guardrails because the narrow bridge was used to transport wide farm equipment with limited ground clearance. Because of these factors, schoolbus operators should avoid using hazardous bridges and other roadways of this type, especially during inclement weather conditions that could make driving conditions even worse along these routes.

The Safety Board has recommended that all Head Start schools adopt the Pupil Transportation Safety Standard, Highway Safety Standard Number 17, 2/ developed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for public and private schools. This standard specifically points out the need for highway departments to "assist schools in the establishment of safe schoolbus routes and loading areas" and to "periodically check the condition of bridges used by schoolbuses." Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Claiborne County Board of Supervisors:

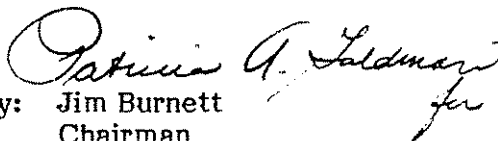
1/ For more information read Highway Accident Report—"Pattison Head Start Center School Van Run-off Bridge and Fire, Near Hermanville, Mississippi, December 17, 1981" (NTSB-HAR-82-5).

2/ Highway Safety Program Standard and Program Manual No. 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety," February 1974, U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Provide engineering assistance to all public and private schools in the county in planning schoolbus routes and transportation policies for inclement weather that would avoid, to the extent possible, hazardous or substandard routes. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-82-39)

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" (P.L. 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendation(s). Therefore, we would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation(s) in this letter.

GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members, concurred in this recommendation. BURNETT, Chairman, did not participate.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman