



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Safety Recommendation

Log H-485A

Date: March 3, 1987

In reply refer to: H-87-3

Reverend Kenneth Weatherspoon
Deliverance Tabernacle Church of God,
Powerhouse Church of God, and
Wayside Church of God in Christ
1917 Nash Avenue
Midland, Texas 79705

On July 20, 1985, a 45-passenger intercity type of church bus carrying 54 passengers en route to Lubbock, Texas, was traveling northbound in the right lane on U.S. Route 87, a four-lane, divided, rural highway, near Ackerly, Texas. It was raining lightly (sprinkling), the pavement was wet, and traffic was light. Two passenger cars carrying church members were following the bus. About 8:15 p.m., the bus skidded in a counterclockwise direction across the left lane, grassy median, and the two southbound lanes, and then it overturned onto its right side. (See figure 1.) Church members in the passenger cars stated that they were traveling between 60 and 62 mph when the bus began rocking side to side and appeared to make a U-turn across the travel lanes. Four bus passengers were ejected and killed; the busdriver and 37 passengers were injured. 1/

The bus, a 1964 General Motors Corporation, Model 4106, was purchased as a used bus by the operators in 1983 or 1984. It was equipped with a diesel engine, air mechanical service brakes, and a 4-speed manual transmission; it had a 45-passenger seating capacity. The bus was co-owned and operated by three separate church groups and was last inspected by the State of Texas in April 1985. The bus co-owners had not established a systematic program for the inspection and maintenance of their buses, and they could not provide a written record of maintenance performed on the bus. Maintenance was performed only on an as-needed basis.

The Safety Board investigated 10 accidents between 1974 and 1984 involving private activity buses not engaged in "for hire" operations. Church activity buses were involved in 7 of the 10 accidents, which resulted in 29 fatalities and nearly 171 injuries. The mechanical condition of the bus was determined to be a causal factor in 4 of the 10 accidents. 2/

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident/Incident Summary Reports--"Near Ackerly, Texas, July 20, 1985; Eureka Springs, Arkansas, September 13, 1985; and Bramwell, West Virginia, October 13, 1985" (NTSB/HAR-87/01/SUM).

2/ For details of the 10 accidents, read Highway Accident Report--"Activity Bus/Tractor-Cargo Tank Semitrailer Collision, State Route 61, Near Devers, Texas, December 23, 1983" (NTSB/HAR-84/06).

Many of the activity buses involved in these accidents had already been retired from service from one or more carriers because of their substantial mileage and age and had been scheduled for replacement. The buses were then purchased used by private organizations and returned to service. Because of the condition of these buses, inspection and maintenance should be performed more frequently to keep them mechanically safe. However, the Safety Board found that inspection and maintenance is usually performed on an "as needed" basis only. Although the mechanical condition of the accident bus was generally satisfactory, the condition of the outside right rear tire was poor and the left rear brake was improperly adjusted. The Safety Board believes that private organizations should implement structured inspection and maintenance programs to ensure that all aspects of the vehicles they operate are in good mechanical condition.

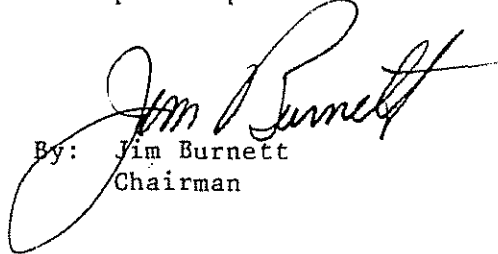
Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Deliverance Tabernacle Church of God, the Powerhouse Church of God, and the Wayside Church of God in Christ:

Establish a systematic vehicle inspection and preventive maintenance program for all church owned and operated vehicles to reduce the likelihood of mechanical failure. Place particular emphasis on critical safety items, such as components in the brakes, tires, suspension, and steering systems. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-87-3)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations H-87-1 and -2 to the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

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. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-87-3 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in this recommendation. GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, did not participate.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman