

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 8, 1978

Forwarded to:

Honorable Joan Claybrook
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-78-8 through 11

About 7:35 a.m., e.s.t., on March 8, 1977, the driver of a Campbell County (Virginia) Public Schools schoolbus started her regular route to pick up students. She had driven about 3.5 miles and had made about eight stops before stopping to pick up other passengers south of Brown's Store on U.S. Highway 29, near Rustburg, Virginia. On leaving Brown's she had 32 passengers on the bus. The busdriver left the stop and traveled to the next stop approximately 980 feet south at about 25 mph. The busdriver stated that she did not see any southbound traffic ahead of or behind her between the stops. About 200 feet from the next stop she started to decelerate and activated the schoolbus flasher lights. She stopped the bus in the right lane, close to the right edge of the roadway. Just as she opened the door, the bus was struck from the rear by a tractor-semitrailer. 1/

Three of the 33 occupants of the schoolbus died as a result of the collision. One of the fatalities was ejected and pinned under the overturned bus. The schoolbus driver sustained head, arm, and leg injuries and multiple abrasions and contusions. Twenty-five of the 29 other bus occupants received minor to serious injuries. The truckdriver sustained chest and abdominal injuries as well as multiple abrasions and contusions.

The truckdriver had a valid North Carolina chauffeur's license. North Carolina records indicate that he was first licensed in that State in the early 1960's, with the latest license renewal date of May 24, 1976. He also held a valid Florida driver's license issued on November 8,

1/ For more detailed information read "Highway Accident Report: Tractor-semitrailer/Schoolbus Collision and Overturn, Rustburg, Virginia, March 8, 1977" (NTSB-HAR-78-1).

1972, with an expiration date of May 31, 1977. In addition, the truckdriver had been issued a Maryland chauffeur's license on August 9, 1963, which expired on August 8, 1965, and a Class I, South Carolina driver's license on December 5, 1969, which expired on December 4, 1973. He had approximately 14 years of commercial truckdriving experience. Over the past 17 years, the truckdriver developed a record which included 38 traffic violation convictions in an eight-state area, with six driver's license suspensions, and four accidents in North Carolina. This record clearly indicates a problem driver. There were no indications that any corrective action was taken or that the suspensions had any impact on the driver as he continued to drive and commit violations while the suspensions were in effect.

Chapter 6 of the Uniform Vehicle Code (UVC) states:

"No person shall receive a driver's license unless and until he surrenders to the department all valid licenses in his possession issued to him by this or any other jurisdiction... no person shall be permitted to have more than one valid driver's license at any time."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Highway Safety Program Standard No. 5, "Driver Licensing," states that each State shall have a driver licensing program to provide that:

"Each driver holds only one license, which identifies the type(s) of vehicle(s) he is authorized to drive. There is a driver improvement program to identify problem drivers for record review and other appropriate actions designed to reduce the frequency of their involvement in traffic accidents or violations."

The States involved in the licensing of this truckdriver should be reminded of the requirements of the highway safety standard and its importance to highway safety.

The schoolbus driver was using her seatbelt. The bus was not equipped with seatbelts for the passengers. One unrestrained passenger was ejected and killed when the bus overturned and pinned the child under the bus. Two of the three occupants of the rearmost rows of seats died as a result of injuries; the third sustained a fractured wrist and lacerations.

The unrestrained movement of the passengers within the schoolbus added to and increased the severity of injuries as they were subjected to impact and overturn forces. The 1972 schoolbus seats were not required to comply with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 222 seating requirements which are supposed to provide compartmentalization and restraint. Rescue attempts were delayed due to the inability to readily gain access to the interior of the bus. The right-side entrance door was blocked; the rear emergency door was deformed and could not be opened, and was blocked by dislocated seats; and none of the left-side windows were open. The injured were first evacuated through the front windshield which was opened with a crowbar.

An amendment to NHTSA's FMVSS No. 217, which became effective October 26, 1976, states:

"Each schoolbus shall comply with either one of the following minimum emergency exit provisions chosen at the option of the manufacturer.

- (a) One rear emergency door that opens outward....or
- (b) One emergency door on the vehicle's left side in the rear half of the bus passenger compartment..., and a push-out rear window that provides a minimum clearance of 16 inches high and 48 inches wide."

The accident schoolbus complied with the standard because of the rear emergency door. However, this did not provide sufficient emergency access. FMVSS No. 217 should be expanded to provide for emergency access to facilitate escape regardless of the attitude of the vehicle following a collision or overturn.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

Determine whether the States of Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina are in compliance with Highway Safety Program Standard No. 5, "Driver Licensing," and if found not in compliance, take necessary action to encourage them to modify their programs to comply. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-8)

Expand Highway Safety Program Standard No. 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety," to provide that no passengers occupy seats in either the foremost or rearmost rows of passenger seats until all other seats have been occupied. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-9)

Modify Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 217 to provide for additional emergency exit points to facilitate escape from and access to schoolbuses regardless of the vehicle's attitude following a collision or overturn. Such exits shall be in addition to the current options set forth in FMVSS No. 217. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-10)

Review available accident statistics involving 1975 and later model schoolbuses equipped with seating arrangements that comply with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 222 to determine if the specific seating, restraining barrier, and impact zone requirements for schoolbuses have reduced the injuries sustained by occupants on these schoolbuses when involved in collisions and rollovers. A report of the findings should be submitted to the National Transportation Safety Board at the earliest opportunity. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-11)

BAILEY, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and KING, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.



By: Kay Bailey
Acting Chairman