

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

SP-20
log H-444

ISSUED: July 8, 1985

Forwarded to:

Mr. T. C. Gilchrist
President
National Safety Council
444 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
H-85-16

About 6:55 a.m., on September 27, 1984, a northbound Florida East Coast Railway Company freight train struck a westbound Indian River Academy schoolbus stalled at a grade crossing on Walton Road in Port St. Lucie, Florida. The grade crossing was a two-lane, asphalt-paved, county road intersecting a single railroad track with automatic flashing signals and gates. The 1968 Bluebird/Chevrolet 66-passenger schoolbus was occupied by the driver and four students. Two of the students fled the stopped schoolbus before impact and were not injured. In the collision, the schoolbus body separated from the chassis, and the three remaining occupants were ejected. The two students were killed, and the busdriver was injured seriously. Neither of the two train crewmembers was injured. 1/

Operation Lifesaver is a nationwide, cooperative effort of many organizations, coordinated by the National Safety Council, to increase public awareness of the hazards at railroad/highway grade crossings and to develop proper driver behavioral patterns for safe crossings. Forty-four States, including Florida, participate in this coordinated program, which involves a wide range of State and local governing bodies, civic groups, safety organizations, transportation industry groups operating in the State, labor groups, public information media, and citizens. In locations where this type of program has been implemented, the results have been impressive in terms of reduced accidents, fatalities, and injuries at grade crossings.

There has been Operation Lifesaver activity in Florida for many years on a fragmented basis. However, there is no evidence that nonpublic schools had been involved in the program. In October 1984, the Florida Operation Lifesaver Council was established to serve as an umbrella entity for all the groups and individuals involved in the program. Although program activities were ongoing and being planned, there was no evidence of educational efforts being aimed directly at nonpublic schoolbus drivers in the State. Such an effort is not uncommon. For example, the Virginia Operation Lifesaver Council has an ongoing program to identify nonpublic schools which operate schoolbuses in that State and to advise them of the availability of Operation Lifesaver presentations and materials.

1/ For more detailed information, read Railroad/Highway Accident Report—"Grade Crossing Collision of Florida East Coast Railway Company Freight Train and Indian River Academy Schoolbus, Port St. Lucie, Florida, September 27, 1984" (NTSB/RHR-85/01).

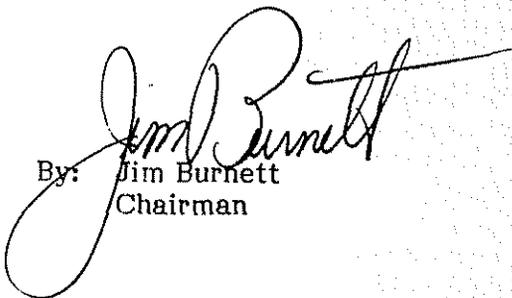
To achieve a high level of safety at railroad/highway grade crossings, all school transportation officials and drivers must be educated about the hazards commonly found at grade crossings and methods available to deal safely with these hazards. Nonpublic schools must be identified and brought into the mainstream of the safety community. The Safety Board believes that State Operation Lifesaver Councils, with their broad-based memberships and constituencies, can best accomplish this task.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Safety Council:

Encourage Operation Lifesaver Councils in each State to identify nonpublic schools which transport students to and from schools, and include these schools in their programs. (Class II, Priority Action)
(H-85-16)

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