

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 A.M., E.D.T., MAY 28, 1976

(202) 426-8787

ISSUED: May 28, 1976

Forwarded to:

Bernard M. Evans
Administrator
Maryland State Highway Administration
300 West Preston Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21203

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-76-20

On October 11, 1975, a charter bus owned and operated by the Metropolitan Coach Company was eastbound, in heavy rain, on Interstate 495 in Bethesda, Maryland. As the bus negotiated a curve to the right at 50 mph, the rear wheels of the bus lost traction on the wet pavement, and the rear of the bus began to slide from side to side. In a slide to the right, the bus rotated counterclockwise 160° and contacted the guardrail. The bus rolled over and came to rest on its left side in a roadside ravine. Of the 29 occupants, 26 were injured.

At the National Transportation Safety Board's request, the Maryland State Highway Administration conducted skid tests at the accident site. At the accident speed of 50 mph, the tests indicated a coefficient of friction of .30.

A Federal Highway Administration memorandum which commented on the accident and on the skid tests results stated that "the skid numbers and past experience with slag mixes such as the one placed on this section of road in 1968, indicate that the surface has lost its initial high coefficient of friction."

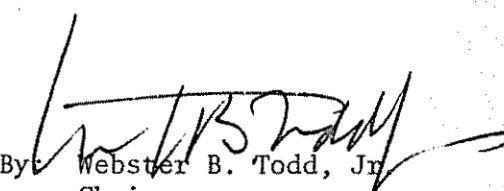
The Maryland State Highway Administration reported that between 1970 and 1974, 70 accidents occurred at this location. Thirty-eight of these accidents (54 percent) occurred during wet weather. The yearly percentage of accidents on wet pavement increased from 30 percent in 1970 to 80 percent in 1973 and dropped to 75 percent in 1974. Since this accident, the State of Maryland has installed a "Slippery when wet" sign at the location. When Safety Board investigators evaluated the sign, they concluded that the sign lacked prominence and would not be noticed by motorists, and also concluded that the speed limit on the approach to and at the accident site is too high, given the reduced coefficient of friction.

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

Install flashing lights, which are activated by wet pavement conditions, to complement the recently installed "Slippery when wet" sign, and reduce the speed limit until construction and resurfacing can be accomplished. (H-76-20) (Class I, Urgent Followup)

The Board's full report will be forwarded at a later date.

TODD, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.


By Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

THIS RECOMMENDATION IS TO BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. NO PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN SHOULD BE MADE BEFORE THAT DATE.