



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: July 24, 1986

In reply refer to: H-86-14 through -16

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On July 5, 1984, a tractor-semitrailer was following a car too closely on wet pavement near Ashdown, Arkansas. When the car slowed suddenly, the truck had to brake hard to avoid hitting it. The truck jackknifed, and the tractor rotated into the oncoming lane and struck a police car. All four police officers in the struck vehicle were killed. 1/

A tractor-semitrailer collided head-on with a church van in Lemoore, California, on October 8, 1982, killing all but 1 of the van's 11 occupants. There had been a stalled car blocking the truck's lane at an intersection. Instead of slowing down, the truck driver attempted to go around the car, and he lost control of the combination vehicle in the process. 2/

These are examples of the heavy truck 3/ accidents investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board in which driver performance was a major factor. The operation of heavy trucks places special demands on the driver, demands he or she may not always be able to meet. Long stopping distances, the possibility of brake fade on steep hills, restricted maneuverability, cargo shifting, and the danger of jackknifing are only a few of the problems that drivers of heavy trucks must face constantly, but which automobile drivers experience rarely, if at all.

1/ Highway Accident Report--"Collision of DeQueen, Arkansas, Police Department Patrol Car and Terrell Trucking, Inc., Tractor-Semitrailer, U.S. Route 71, Ashdown, Arkansas, July 5, 1984" (NTSB/HAR-84/07).

2/ Highway Accident Report--"J.C. Sales, Inc., Tractor-Semitrailer and Calvary Baptist Church Van Collision, State Route 198 at 19th Avenue near Lemoore, California, October 8, 1982" (NTSB/HAR-83/02).

3/ According to the definition used by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, all of the following are considered heavy trucks: 1) single-unit (or "straight") truck with gross vehicle weight greater than 26,000 pounds; 2) tractor-trailer combination; 3) truck pulling one or more cargo trailers; and 4) tractor pulling no trailer. A medium truck is any single-unit truck with a gross vehicle weight between 10,000 and 26,000 pounds. While this recommendation letter deals generally with drivers of heavy trucks, many of the observations apply also to those driving medium ones. Light vehicles, such as pickup trucks, are excluded.

Truck driving is a specialized skill, distinct in many ways, and more demanding than operating a smaller vehicle, such as a car. However, far too many people are able to enter the field without having first acquired that skill. The Safety Board has completed a study that examines the system that prepares candidates for employment as truck drivers and then initially places them into service. ^{4/} The objective of the study was to identify weaknesses in the system, to describe current efforts for improvement, and to offer recommendations for ways to augment those efforts.

Formal training is the most reliable way to learn the special skills required for safe truck driving. Such training is available from proprietary, State, and motor carrier-owned schools, but, at present, there are few safeguards to ensure quality of instruction and insufficient incentives for a prospective truck driver to enroll in any school.

Three elements are needed to significantly upgrade the quality of formal truck driver training programs and to increase their utilization throughout the industry:

- A single, universally accepted set of criteria against which all training schools can be measured for accreditation.
- A system of evaluating each school and certifying whether it has met the criteria.
- A means of encouraging prospective truck drivers to obtain training, and only at schools that meet the criteria.

The Proposed Minimum Standards for Training Tractor-Trailer Drivers, recently issued by the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS), have the potential to satisfy the first of these requirements, and the BMCS Model Curriculum offers a ready-made plan with which a school could meet those Standards.

As indicated in the title of the project, the BMCS Standards are proposed. That means suggestions for changes are still welcome. The Professional Truck Driver Institute could be a major source for such suggestions by directly reviewing the BMCS Standards and by soliciting the views of other members of the trucking and trucking and training industries. The BMCS project title also indicates that it constitutes minimum standards. Another role for the Institute therefore could be to stress this to training schools and motor carriers, urging them not merely to meet the Standards but to exceed them.

The Institute could carry out these functions without developing a separate set of standards. Training schools can be evaluated for accreditation most effectively when measured against a single set of criteria, and the BMCS Proposed Minimum Standards hold the promise of being well suited to that purpose. It is true that a scheduled validation study of the Standards could take 5 years to complete, but it does not appear likely that the Institute could complete both the development and proper validation of its own standards any sooner. For those who need training standards immediately, the unvalidated BMCS materials are already available.

^{4/} Safety Study--"Training, Licensing, and Qualification Standards for Drivers of Heavy Trucks" (NTSB/SS-86/02).

The Safety Board, therefore, believes the Institute would be well advised to develop an accreditation program that would apply training school standards rigorously and uniformly. Institute members and staff are already knowledgeable about safe truck operations and effective truck driver training. It may be advisable for the Institute to work in conjunction with accrediting bodies already in existence, such as the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools and the National Home Study Council, because these groups have experience in assessing schools' business and educational practices. But the area of greatest safety concern, course content, is the one where the Institute can be expected to have preeminent expertise.

The Safety Board has recommended that a training requirement for truck drivers, based on the BMCS Standards, be incorporated into the Federal rules that regulate interstate truck operations. To reach all drivers, including those who operate within a single State and therefore, are not covered by the Federal regulations, the Safety Board also has recommended that the training requirement be made one of the criteria for obtaining a proposed national truck driver license. Once such requirements are in place, an accreditation system will be needed to identify those schools that meet the standards.

There also would be a need for the Institute's accreditation function even before there is a regulatory training requirement or a national truck driver license. Today, a majority of truck driver training schools are able to function without accreditation. But once there are uniform curriculum standards and an accreditation program applying them authoritatively, changes could be instituted in the trucking industry that would make it difficult for a school to remain in business without obtaining accreditation. The Safety Board has recommended that motor carriers, through voluntary action and under pressure from their insurers, employ only those drivers who have been trained in accredited programs. In the case of drivers who own their own trucks, the Board has said that shippers should require the same of the drivers with whom they contract.

The message will need to reach prospective truck drivers that, without a certificate showing successful completion of training from an accredited school, they are unlikely to find jobs in the industry. A program is needed not only to convey that message through traditional means, such as brochures distributed to vocational guidance counselors, but also to develop new education techniques. Since most vocational school students now make enrollment decisions based on little more than school advertising, new methods must be developed to educate prospective truck drivers in a timely fashion.

Improved guidance programs for prospective students are needed not only in conjunction with recommended future regulations and accreditation efforts; they are needed today as well. Like any other consumer in a marketplace, today's prospective truck driving student is confronted with a choice among services of varying quality. Particularly since there is still lacking a uniform set of training standards and a system of evaluating schools against those standards, prospective students need to do their own school assessment before enrolling. There is far too little information available on how to conduct such an assessment. If the prospective student does not know what to look for and what questions to ask, he or she may end up enrolling in an expensive but worthless program. When that happens, more is lost than that person's money and time. The opportunity also is lost to produce a qualified, safe driver.

The Safety Board believes that the National Safety Council is the appropriate organization to coordinate development of a guidance program for prospective truck drivers. In addition to the Professional Truck Driver Institute, the organizations that should work with the Council in this project are the American Trucking Associations, Inc.; the Private Truck Council of America, Inc.; the Owner Operator

Independent Drivers Association of America; the International Brotherhood of Teamsters; and the National Association of Truck Driving Schools.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Professional Truck Driver Institute of the Trucking Industry Alliance:

Compile and submit to the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS) the views of members of the trucking and truck driver training industries concerning any needed revisions in the BMCS Proposed Minimum Standards and Model Curriculum for Training Tractor-Trailer Drivers. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-14)

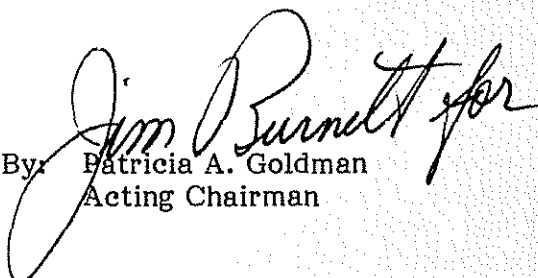
Develop a program for evaluating truck driver training schools, using the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety Minimum Standards as criteria, once the standards have been validated. Such a program could be established in coordination with the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools and the National Home Study Council. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-15)

Work with the National Safety Council to develop a guidance program designed to reach as many people as possible who are considering a career in commercial truck driving. The program should explain the considerations in such a vocational choice, the value of formal training, and the factors to consider in selecting a truck driver training school. The program also should inform prospective students about which schools have met the criteria established by the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety Minimum Standards. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-16)

(Separate letters containing a recommendation corresponding to Safety Recommendation H-86-16 have been sent to the American Trucking Associations, Inc.; the International Brotherhood of Teamsters; the Private Truck Council of America, Inc.; the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association of America; and the National Association of Truck Driving Schools.)

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 recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations H-86-14 through -16 in your reply.

GOLDMAN, Acting Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, and NALL, Members, concurred in these recommendations.

By: 
Patricia A. Goldman
Acting Chairman