

Log # 422

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 24, 1984

Forwarded to:

Commissioner's Court of Liberty County
Liberty County Court House
Liberty, Texas 77575

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-84-71

About 7:40 p.m., central standard time, on December 23, 1983, a southbound church bus (bus) suddenly veered leftward, crossed the centerline of State Route 61, a 2-lane, 2-way highway, and struck head on a northbound tractor cargo tank semitrailer near Devers, Texas. The tractor cargo tank semitrailer penetrated from 5.5 to 6.5 feet into the passenger compartment of the 1970 former schoolbus. The busdriver and all 21 passengers aboard were ejected through the front opening created in the collision. The truckdriver, the busdriver, and eight bus passengers were killed. Thirteen other bus passengers were injured. 1/

The Liberty County Sheriff's Department was notified of the accident at 7:53 p.m. A Texas Highway Patrol Trooper was dispatched and arrived on scene about 7:56 p.m. He observed the extent of injuries and fatalities and immediately requested medical assistance, wreckage service, and all available ambulances and rescue and emergency response personnel. The surrounding community's fire departments dispatched four vehicles, and the Texas Highway Patrol dispatched seven vehicles to the scene. Twelve ambulances and 18 emergency medical technicians (EMT) and emergency care attendants (ECA) were dispatched to the scene. First aid was administered to surviving victims by the EMT's, ECA's, and police officers, but no triage was set up to establish injury treatment priorities.

Seven victims were pronounced dead at the scene. All others were transported by ambulance to four area hospitals for treatment. Two victims died while en route to the hospital and one other victim died 5 days after the accident. Although the Liberty County Fire Department had a written mass casualty plan, no formal mutual aid agreements existed between the fire department and other Liberty County emergency response units or between Liberty County and other surrounding jurisdictions. Informal local procedures were used to request assistance.

1/ For more detailed information read: Highway Accident Report—"Church Bus/Tractor-Cargo Tank Semitrailer Collision on State Route 61 Near Devers, Texas, December 23, 1983" (NTSB/HAR-84/06).

4005/268

The emergency response by Liberty County was effective for the accident conditions where 10 vehicle occupants were killed and 13 were injured. In a more serious accident involving a higher number of casualties, such as 30 to 50 injured bus passengers, a general call for emergency response without a prearranged plan of action may not be as effective.

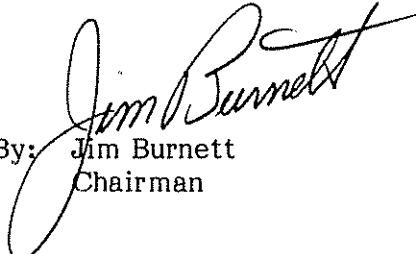
Liberty County should develop a disaster plan to include all fire, police, medical, and emergency support agencies within the County, as well as in adjacent counties. The plan should be coordinated with neighboring communities to provide clear guidelines on jurisdiction and logistical requirements, medical resource availability, and communication needs and capabilities. The plan should also provide details on establishing a triage system for injured persons and for determining the level of response to local disasters.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Commissioner's Court of Liberty County Texas:

Develop a disaster plan to include all fire, police, medical, and emergency support agencies within the county as well as adjacent counties which provides clear guidelines on jurisdiction, logistical requirements, medical resource availability, communication needs, and the need for establishing a triage system in the event of a catastrophic accident. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-84-71)

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 the Board 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 GROSE, Member, concurred in this recommendation. BURSLEY, Member, did not participate.

By: 
Chairman