

Log H-358

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: May 9, 1983

Forwarded to:
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Director
Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety
Federal Highway Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
H-83-21

About 7:50 a.m., p.d.t, on October 8, 1982, an automobile stopped at the stop line in the southbound lane of 19th Avenue at its intersection with State Route (SR) 198 near Lemoore, California. After waiting for traffic to clear, the driver accelerated the automobile into the intersection. The automobile's engine stalled, and the vehicle came to a stop, blocking the westbound curb lane on SR 198 in which a westbound tractor-semitrailer was approaching the intersection. While the automobile driver was attempting to restart his vehicle's engine, the tractor-semitrailer continued toward the intersection with no apparent lessening of speed. The driver started the automobile engine and moved the vehicle forward to a position which partially blocked the westbound curb lane and also partially obstructed the westbound median lane. However, the driver stopped the automobile before clearing the intersection when he saw that the truck was close to his automobile. The truckdriver swerved his vehicle left and applied the brakes to avoid striking the automobile. The truck traveled to the left of the center of the highway, through the intersection, and into the eastbound curb lane where it collided head-on with an eastbound van. Nine of the van's 11 occupants were killed in the collision, 1 passenger died 3 days later, and 1 passenger received minor injuries. The truckdriver received serious injuries.

The 20-year-old truckdriver held a valid California Class 1 operator's license which had no restrictions and which was valid for the type of vehicle being driver. Since he was less than 21 years old, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR's) prohibited his driving interstate. Logbooks found in the tractor showed that the driver had made several trips from California to Arizona. Between November 23, 1979, and April 29, 1982, the truckdriver's driving record showed: one previous accident; six speeding violations (five in California and one in Arizona); one red light violation; and multiple truck weight, registration, and equipment violations. Investigation also revealed several instances where the truckdriver had falsified his driving logs.

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

Currently, there are no universally recognized commercial driver training standards. The FMCSR's provide that a motor carrier driver may qualify "by reason of experience or training, or both." 2/ The lack of specific qualification criteria results in a broad spectrum of training standards and driver qualifications. A 1982 U.S. Department of Transportation report to Congress 3/ revealed that: (1) 85 percent of drivers involved in commercial vehicle accidents have had no formal commercial driver training, (2) drivers with less than 2 years' experience are involved in 49 percent of the large truck accidents, and (3) drivers of large trucks who are younger than 25 are involved in more accidents than are drivers of passenger cars who are younger than 25.

The Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS) has conducted a study entitled "Control of Large Commercial Vehicle Accidents Caused by Front Tire Failure" (DOT FH-11-8562). In 1975, as a result of the study, the BMCS indicated that it intended to develop and test tractor-trailer driver training standards and course curricula for the training of commercial vehicle drivers. The purpose of the course was to improve the training programs which did not address emergency driving problems and their solutions.

On May 30, 1975, following its investigation of a truck and bus accident in Bordentown, New Jersey, 4/ the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation H-75-9 to the BMCS, urging that

Upon the completion of the research dealing with the development of the tractor-trailer driver training standards, distribute such training course information to all professional commercial driver training schools.

On June 12, 1975, the BMCS replied that when the course curricula are completed and tested, it intends to issue them as "recommended practices" for training standards. These practices would enable motor carriers and existing and prospective commercial driver training schools to upgrade their curricula to insure uniform quality of training. This recommendation remains in an "Open--Acceptable Action" status, but the BMCS has yet to issue any training standards.

The events of this accident, which caused the loss of 10 lives, clearly demonstrate that the truckdriver was incapable of safely operating the vehicle he was driving during a situation that is not uncommon for a driver to encounter. The Safety Board has investigated several other accidents in which drivers of large motor vehicles have similarly demonstrated a lack of ability to safely operate their vehicles. Many trades and professions require years of training coupled with extensive testing before a trainee receives a license. Considering the loss of life each year in accidents involving large motor vehicles, the Safety Board believes that standards should be established for the training of professional drivers of large motor vehicles and that they should be adequately trained and required to demonstrate through a comprehensive examination their ability to operate large motor vehicles under normal and adverse conditions before being licensed to drive.

2/ See 49 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 391.11(3) and (4).

3/ U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "A Report to the Congress on Large-Truck Accident Causation," July 1982.

4/ Highway Accident Report—"George Wollman Meats, Inc., Truck/Auto/Greyhound Bus Collision and Fires, New Jersey Turnpike, Bordentown, New Jersey, October 19, 1973" (NTSB-HAR-75-3).

Ongoing BMCS studies of commercial vehicle driver training are progressing on schedule. However, the BMCS has stated that it intends to use the data developed through these studies to establish recommended practices for the trucking industry. The Safety Board believes that practices that are critical to the prevention of accidents in large commercial motor vehicles should be required rather than merely recommended. Therefore, the Safety Board concludes that the BMCS should expeditiously complete its work in developing and testing Tractor-Trailer Driver Training Standards and, upon completion, add those standards to Part 391 of the FMCSR's. Furthermore, the Safety Board concludes that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration should expedite its ongoing research to develop large motor vehicle driver licensing examination criteria and examination procedures and standards and, after testing them, expeditiously disseminate the procedures and standards and urge their adoption and use by the States. With the advent of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 and the longer, wider truck combinations and double bottoms, this training now is more important than ever.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board reiterates Safety Recommendation H-75-9 of May 30, 1975, and further recommends that the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety:

Upon completion of the testing of the Tractor-Trailer Driver Training Standards, the Sample Model Curriculum, and final examination criteria, amend Part 391, "Qualifications of Drivers," of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations to include criteria and standards for the training of tractor-trailer drivers. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-21)

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman

