

Log H 377

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: December 14, 1983

Forwarded to:

Mr. George Meese
Director
Department of Motor Vehicles
State of California
Post Office Box 11828
Sacramento, California 95853

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-83-65 and -66

On February 24, 1983, an empty dump truck, traveling north on State Route 96, a two-lane rural highway near Willow Creek, California, suddenly veered left across the centerline and collided head-on with a southbound schoolbus loaded with 37 occupants. The truckdriver and one schoolbus passenger seated directly behind the schoolbus driver were killed; the schoolbus driver and 30 passengers were injured.

Available medical records indicate that the truckdriver had several medical problems. He was admitted to a hospital in 1965 after complaining of loss of memory and dizziness. The diagnosis was schizoid personality, convulsive disorder, and anxiety reaction. He was referred to a psychiatrist for treatment. From 1966 to 1972, he periodically suffered from the loss of vision. The diagnosis was renal glycosuria (an abnormally large amount of sugar in the urine), and he was advised to have frequent small meals which had high protein contents. He later reported to his doctor that eating five or six candy bars per day prevented passing out spells. Following an episode of loss of vision in 1978, the truckdriver was referred to the Humboldt County Mental Health Clinic in Eureka, California. Several electroencephalograms were performed as a result of his passing out spells, but the test results were normal.

In 1972, the truckdriver was treated for a lower abdominal muscle strain with an associated diagnosis of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Symptoms of hypoglycemia are characterized by sudden onset and include faintness, inability to concentrate, sweating, weakness, nervousness, hunger, sometimes mental confusion, and visual disturbances and unconsciousness. Medical records also showed that between 1972 and 1982 he had a left exploratory tympanotomy and stapes mobilization, suffered from hypoglycemia, had an appendectomy and was treated for hemorrhoids, proctitis, bursitis, and a cyst. He had a hemorrhoidectomy in 1982.

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report--"Collision of Humboldt County Dump Truck and Klamath-Trinity Unified District Schoolbus, State Route 96 near Willow Creek, California, February 25, 1983" (NTSB/HAR-83/05).

3799A

There is no record of the truckdriver having reported any of the above medical problems either on his employment application, dated July 1980, or during his medical examination performed for his truckdriver's license renewal in March 1981. However, he did advise his immediate supervisor of his hypoglycemia problem. Under the "Health and History" section on the medical examination form, the truckdriver checked "no" for the following items: seizures, fits, convulsions or fainting, nervous stomach, suffering from any other disease, psychiatric disorder, and any other nervous disorder. Although the medical examination was performed by a licensed medical doctor, none of his previous medical conditions was noted on the medical examination form.

The truckdriver did not properly advise his employer of all his medical problems. The truckdriver had two medical examinations between 1980 and 1982; a preemployment physical examination before beginning work with Humboldt County, and another routine physical examination which was performed in conjunction with his driver's license renewal. Neither examination uncovered any of the truckdriver's previous medical problems. Although the truckdriver knew of at least two of his medical problems, there is no record of the truckdriver having reported any of his medical problems during these two examinations. By failing to volunteer this information, the truckdriver hampered the examining physician's ability to diagnose his medical problems accurately and their possible bearing on the truckdriver's ability to work and drive.

Neither the Humboldt County medical examination form nor the State of California Medical Information examination report requires the applicant to declare that the statements and answers provided for each physical examination form are true and complete to the best of the applicant's knowledge. There are no provisions regarding fraud or falsification of information on either form. Basically, both forms are formal questionnaires which allow the applicant to disclose only that personal medical history which the applicant deems to be appropriate. It is apparent that the omission of relevant medical facts can encumber the county and State's ability to determine adequately if an applicant 2/ is medically qualified.

The Safety Board believes that the requirements for obtaining a class 1 or class 2 motor vehicle operator's license should be expanded to include a provision which requires an applicant to submit complete and explicit medical information. Moreover, if under the existing administrative authority, there are no provisions regarding fraud or the falsification of medical information, pursuant to obtaining a class 1 or class 2 motor vehicle operator's license, then consideration should be given to enacting the appropriate legislation to do so.

As a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the State of California Department of Motor Vehicles:

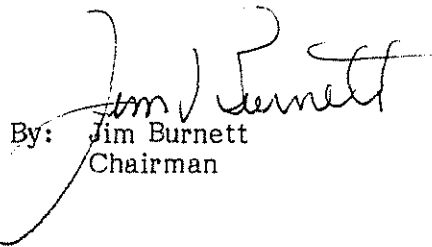
Expand its medical qualifications requirements for a class 1 and 2 motor vehicle operator's license to include a provision which requires an applicant to submit complete and explicit medical information, including one's medical history. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-65)

2/ Applicant for a State of California class 1 and 2 motor vehicle operator's license or county driving position which requires a valid class 1 or 2 operator's license.

Consider enacting appropriate legislation to prohibit the falsification and/or omission of medical information pursuant to obtaining a class 1 and 2 motor vehicle operator's license if current administrative authority will not permit the present medical qualifications to be expanded. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-83-66)

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" (P.L. 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 recommendations in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman

