

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 10, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Thomas D. Larson
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 Transportation and Safety Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-80-5 and -6

On February 7, 1979, the driver of a tractor-semitrailer traveling east on I-70 at New Stanton, Pennsylvania, lost control of his vehicle and plunged down an embankment just east of a bridge spanning Legislative Route 117. The driver was killed and the truck was destroyed.

It was snowing at the time and the temperature was below freezing. Below-freezing temperatures and precipitation during the winter months had resulted in frost heaves throughout the area. At the bridge, the ice lifted the concrete pavement adjacent to the expansion joints 3 to 4 inches above the bridge deck. The condition was accentuated by the 40° skew of the bridge. The usual short-term maintenance practice is to feather the rise with bituminous material. No such feathering was in place at the accident location nor were there signs warning of the hazardous condition. Two other accidents occurred at this site within 2 days as a result of the frost heave.

Supervisory highway maintenance personnel had ridden over the bridge at the accident site daily and had failed to notice or report the condition. After the accident, only the eastbound lanes were feathered; the westbound lanes were not feathered until after the National Transportation Safety Board investigators visited the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's county maintenance office the week after the fatal accident. Had feathering or adequate warning devices been in place, these accidents may have been prevented.

Since frost heaves at specific locations cannot be predicted, active surveillance by highway personnel during winter months is vital. The State's regional highway office has a night patrol, the basic responsibilities of which is to report on snow and ice conditions and to aid disabled or stranded motorists. The use of a night patrol in Pennsylvania is a relatively new program, and although innovative, its safety benefits could be increased significantly by instructing and training the patrolmen to recognize and report existing and potentially hazardous highway


conditions. Likewise, all other employees of the Department of Transportation, especially maintenance personnel in supervisory positions, should be aware of the importance of recognizing and reporting existing or potentially hazardous highway conditions they observe during the course of their everyday activities.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation:

Establish a program which will assure prompt identification, reporting and correction of hazardous highway conditions. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-80-5).

Establish a program which will ensure that the State's maintenance and night patrol personnel are trained to recognize hazardous highway conditions as they develop. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-80-6)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations. GOLDMAN, Member, dissented.


By: James B. King
Chairman