



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

H-595B

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**Date:** August 5, 1998

**In reply refer to:** H-98-18

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Executive Director  
National Association of Governors' Highway  
Safety Representatives  
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About 5:52 a.m. on February 12, 1997, a doubles truck with empty trailers, operated by Consolidated Freightways, Inc., that was traveling northbound on U.S. Route 41, a four-lane divided limited access highway, near Slinger, Wisconsin, lost control and crossed over the 50-foot depressed median into the southbound lanes. A flatbed truck loaded with lumber, operated by McFaul Transport, Inc., that was traveling southbound on U.S. Route 41 collided with the doubles truck, lost control, and crossed over the median into the northbound lanes. A northbound passenger van with nine adult occupants struck and underrode the right front side of the flatbed truck at the landing gear. A refrigerator truck loaded with produce, operated by Glandt/Dahlke, Inc., that was also traveling northbound, struck the right rear side of the flatbed truck. Although it had snowed from about 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. the night before, it was clear at the time of the accident. Other motorists and the emergency responders to the accident scene reported icy patches in the roadway. Eight of the nine van occupants suffered fatal injuries, and the remaining occupant suffered serious injuries. Two of the three commercial truckdrivers were treated for minor injuries and released; the third refused treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Because this was a cross-median accident, the National Transportation Safety Board reviewed the median issues raised by the Slinger accident. The 1996 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials *Roadside Design Guide* warrants for median barriers on high-speed, controlled-access roadways that have relatively flat medians consider traffic volumes, median widths, and accident histories. Based on the standards provided in this guide, the average daily traffic and median width on U.S. Route 41 in the area of the accident indicate

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<sup>1</sup>For further information, read Highway Accident Report—*Multiple Vehicle Crossover Accident. Slinger, Wisconsin, February 12, 1997* (NTSB/HAR-98/01).

that median barriers are not necessary at this location. In addition, a review of the individual accident reports showed that this location did not have a history of cross-median accidents.

One of the criteria for determining the need for median barriers in any location is a history of cross-median accidents at that location. Median barriers can prevent and ameliorate accidents, and such barriers might have made a difference in the Slinger accident. Accurate and complete data on crossover accidents are important because they help ensure that median barriers are installed where they are needed. Yet most States do not have a cross-median data element on their official accident reporting forms.

Since the Slinger accident occurred, the Safety Board has investigated several other cross-median accidents and has found that cross-median accident histories are not readily available. For example, about 9:55 p.m. on April 25, 1997, a southbound doubles truck operated by the United Parcel Service lost control and crossed over the 64-foot grass median of Interstate 95 in Jacksonville, Florida. The doubles truck collided with a passenger car and a tractor semitrailer in the northbound lanes. All vehicles were damaged extensively and four fatalities resulted. While trying to determine the accident history for this location, the Safety Board was told by Florida Department of Transportation officials that they had experienced difficulty in identifying median crossover accidents. For example, at one location, a few miles in length, they were aware of several median crossover accidents, yet their efforts to identify these accidents by searching the records were unsuccessful. On the official report of the Jacksonville accident, both the contributing circumstance and the harmful event were coded as "other."

A review of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) publication, *State Accident Report Forms Catalog, 1995 Update*, revealed that only six States, (Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Missouri) have a data element on their reporting forms for "median crossover" accidents. NHTSA, the Federal Highway Administration, and the NAGHSR are currently developing a *Guideline for Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria*. The Safety Board reviewed the October 1997 draft of this document and found no mention of crossed medians as a data element.

Because reporting forms typically lack a cross-median data element, individual accident reports must be reviewed or other codes, such as head-on collisions, must be employed to capture cross-median accident data. In addition, cross-median data may be coded as "other," making it very difficult to separate from unrelated data. Consequently, the Safety Board concluded that cross-median accidents are probably underreported because most accident reporting forms do not have a separate data element for them, and using other reporting elements to capture cross-median accidents may not result in full and accurate accounting.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board makes the following safety recommendation to the National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives:

Include a data element for cross-median accidents in the *Guideline for Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria*, which you are developing with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Highway Administration.  
(H-98-18)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations H-98-8 through -13 to the Federal Highway Administration; H-98-14 through -17 to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; H-98-19 through -23 to the American Trucking Associations, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the Motor Freight Carrier Association; H-98-24 to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials; H-98-25 to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation; and H-98-26 to the Independent Truckers and Drivers Association, the National Private Truck Council, and the Owner-Operators Independent Drivers Association, Inc.

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 action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-98-18 in your reply. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6484.

Chairman HALL, Vice Chairman FRANCIS, and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

By:   
Jim Hall  
Chairman