

H-742

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: May 3, 1978

Forwarded to:

Honorable Joan Claybrook
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)
H-78-21 through 26

The National Transportation Safety Board has recently completed a safety effectiveness evaluation of the National Accident Sampling System (NASS). ^{1/} This evaluation was requested by the Subcommittee on Transportation and Related Agencies of the Senate Appropriations Committee. It was performed under specific authority contained in the Independent Safety Board Act of 1974.

As proposed, NASS is designed "to produce nationally representative accident data with sufficient accuracy and detail to provide an objective means of setting and evaluating many motor vehicle and highway safety standards." Should these general objectives be fulfilled, the Safety Board believes NASS will benefit highway safety. In fact, the lack of definitive, reliable, nationally representative data in the highway mode is one of the most critical problems that exists today in transportation safety.

The Safety Board evaluation has discovered that the NASS program, as planned for the next 5 or more years, falls short of the publicly stated objectives. Specifically, the program emphasizes motor vehicle crashworthiness and excludes for the most part data that would contribute to accident prevention research and countermeasure development. Especially conspicuous is the lack of data on important problem areas in the highway environment.

^{1/} "Safety Effectiveness Evaluation of the National Accident Sampling System" (Report No. NTSB-SEE-78-1, adopted March 2, 1978).

The Safety Board recognizes that a new program cannot be all things to all groups. It does, however, believe that a national program with the stated scope of NASS must provide a balance of services to all elements of the highway safety community which have a supportable need for the type of data that can be collected. This can best be achieved if adequate dialogue is established and maintained between the many user groups of the highway safety community and the NHTSA.

NASS is an extremely complex undertaking. The pilot program will address many of the problems which must be solved before NASS can be fully implemented and will no doubt identify many new problems needing solutions. Other problems will be identified and solutions offered as various supportive studies are completed.

The Safety Board evaluation has discovered instances where the implementation of NASS has preceded necessary planning. NASS must be developed systematically and expanded in size only when sufficient planning and evaluation have been completed.

The Safety Board is concerned that the NHTSA has not adequately considered two areas. First, problems exist which might seriously hinder the proper collection of data for certain key elements such as injury information. Secondly, the NASS investigators might become involved in litigation and might be called upon to testify or supply depositions for such proceedings. Both of these situations, if realized, might interfere with their investigatory functions, cause delays, and increase costs.

Even when fully implemented, the NASS program will inherently contain limitations, primarily because of the scope of the investigative effort. The Safety Board believes the NASS data will be more useful in the future if the field investigation files are centrally located, contain all associated documentation including photographs, and are easily retrievable. This would allow researchers to obtain additional information beyond that which had already been coded.

In summary, the Safety Board believes that a national accident data system is needed to fulfill needs not now provided for in other existing data collection systems at various levels of government. Through improved planning and broader perspective, the NASS program could become an important part of the highway safety effort and should be supported through sustained funding.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

Establish a NASS Advisory Committee to provide NHTSA with a broader perspective of types of data that should be collected and methods of data storage and retrieval. The committee membership should be balanced and include persons from automobile manufacturers, highway user groups, the insurance industry, governors' highway safety representatives, highway engineering agencies, medical and legal professions, statistical and economic professions, and the private and governmental highway safety research community. (H-78-21) (Class II, Priority Action)

Study the practical problems associated with collecting key data, such as injury data, to determine the magnitude of any problems and to assess the impact on the effectiveness of the NASS program before selecting the number and location of future NASS investigation sites. (H-78-22) (Class II, Priority Action)

Study the effects on the cost and quality of data collection that could result from the need for NASS investigators to testify in liability cases resulting from motor accidents. The study should consider the need, advisability, and obtainment of a limited shield for NASS investigators. (H-78-23) (Class II, Priority Action)

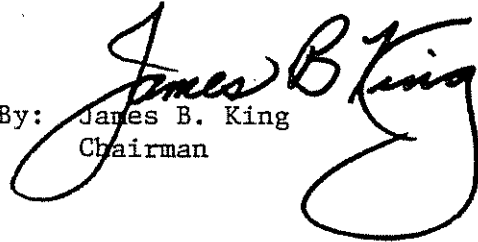
Assure that the number of NASS accident investigation sites will not be expanded beyond the original 10 until after experience with field data collection and processing is evaluated; the exposure data system design, sample design, accident causation methodology, and other NASS studies are completed; and a comprehensive plan for further implementation of NASS is developed and made public. (H-78-24) (Class II, Priority Action)

Ensure that copies of the sanitized accident reports and case files including photographs completed by each team are retained and systematically filed at a central location for easy retrieval for future use by persons interested in further in-depth research. (H-78-25) (Class II, Priority Action)

Revise the currently proposed data collection forms to include substantially increased emphasis on the highway environment. The recommendations and counsel of the Federal Highway Administration should be sought and utilized. (H-78-26) (Class II, Priority Action)

KING, Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and DRIVER, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.

By: James B. King
Chairman

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James B. King". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "J" and "K".