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Log# H-552D



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: August 22, 1990

In reply refer to: H-90-84 through -85

Honorable Salvador Vela, Mayor
City of Alton
P.O. Box 9004
Alton, TX 78572

About 7:34 a.m., central daylight time, on Thursday, September 21, 1989, a westbound school bus with 81 students operated by the Mission Consolidated Independent School District, Mission, Texas, and a northbound delivery truck operated by the Valley Coca-Cola Bottling Company, McAllen, Texas, collided at Bryan Road and Farm-to-Market Road Number 676 (FM 676) in Alton, Texas. Nineteen students died at the accident scene, and two died later in the hospital. The 21 fatalities were the result of drowning or complications related to the submersion. Furthermore, 3 students sustained serious injuries, 46 others sustained minor injuries, and 11 students were not injured.¹

A local resident made the initial telephone notification in a timely manner. However, the resident did not know that in addition to the truck, a school bus was involved in the accident and was completely submerged in the caliche pit. The Safety Board concludes that based on commonly accepted police procedures the Alton police officer who received this call should have immediately requested the Hidalgo County Sheriff's communications center to dispatch emergency units. Upon his arrival at the accident scene, he should have established a command post to coordinate the resources as they arrived.

As the various police and rescue units arrived on the scene, they initially functioned independently of each other in a reasonably efficient

¹For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report--"Collision between Mission Consolidated Independent School District School Bus and Valley Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Inc., Tractor-Semitrailer, Intersection of Bryan Road and Texas Farm-to-Market Road Number 676, in Alton, Texas, September 21, 1989" (NTSB/HAR-90-02).

manner, rather than in a typical on-scene incident command situation.² The initial lack of coordination between police and rescue units may have contributed to early problems with crowd and traffic control.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the City of Alton:

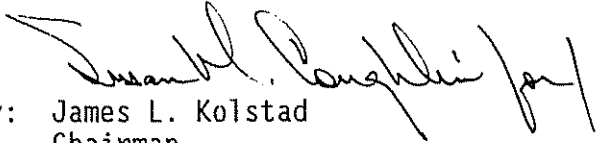
Provide public safety personnel assigned to telephone duties with training in techniques of handling calls for emergency assistance. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-90-84)

Provide public safety personnel with guidance in handling emergency response, command, and on-scene control of community-wide emergencies and disaster. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-90-85)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations H-90-74 through -78 and reiterated H-89-5 to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; H-90-79 through -80 to the Texas Department of Public Safety; H-90-81 to the Texas Education Agency; H-90-82 through -83 to the Hidalgo County; H-90-86 to the Mission Consolidated Independent School District; H-90-87 to the Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc.; H-90-88 through -89 to the Valley Coca-Cola Bottling Co., Inc.; and H-90-90 to the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services.

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 recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations H-90-84 through -85 in your reply.

KOLSTAD, Chairman, COUGHLIN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and BURNETT, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James L. Kolstad
Chairman

²In this system the incident commander divides duties into distinct, manageable activities and designates the management of those activities to a qualified officer or other person. The incident commander then obtains needed information and directs actions to be implemented through his appointed personnel.