

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FOR RELEASE: 6:30 P.M., E.D.T., MARCH 1, 1976

(202) 426-8787

ISSUED: March 1, 1976

Forwarded to:

Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor
State of California
Capitol Building
Sacramento, California 95814

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION

H-76-1

At 11:45 a.m. on Friday, May 9, 1975, a Siskiyou Union High School District (California) schoolbus carrying 19 passengers was northbound on Interstate 5 near Ashland, Oregon.

The busdriver entered a steep downgrade with the bus in fourth gear and in high range, and used the air service brakes heavily to control the bus' speed. When the bus had descended about seven-tenths of a mile, improperly adjusted brakes and thermal expansion of the drums caused the brakes to fade. The driver attempted to downshift the 2-speed rear axle but was unsuccessful. She continued alternately to apply and to release the brakes. This caused a rapid loss of air pressure. As the bus gained momentum, the driver attempted unsuccessfully to shift the transmission from fourth to third gear.

Soon after the buzzer warning of low air pressure sounded, the passengers were instructed to get down on the floor. The driver blew the horn to warn vehicles ahead as she intermittently attempted to shift gears and brake the vehicle. The driver of an automobile, also northbound in the left lane, did not hear or see the bus before it struck the rear of the car and shoved it in a 180° arc to the east. The bus slipped sideways, vaulted a curb and a guardrail section, and rolled over twice down a steep slope. The roof separated from the bus and swung off as the bus came to rest upright some 213 feet from the edge of the roadway.

Nineteen of the bus' 20 occupants were ejected. Three occupants were killed and 15 others were injured.

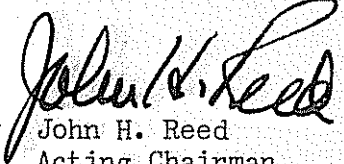
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Although the State of California has requirements under Title 5 of the Administrative Code of California for the systematic inspection and maintenance of schoolbuses, the law does not specify how often schoolbuses should be inspected or maintained. A systematic preventive-maintenance program should be set up on a time- or mileage-basis, or a combination of both, to minimize vehicle breakdown en route and the possibility of part failure that could lead to a crash. The schoolbus in this accident had not been so maintained. It is important to have such requirements and it is equally important to insure that they are complied with.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the State of California:

Insure the implementation of all the provisions of Federal Highway Safety Program Standard No. 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety," especially the provisions relating to the systematic preventative maintenance and the semiannual inspection of schoolbuses. (H-76-1) (Class II, Priority Followup)

REED, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.


By: John H. Reed
Acting Chairman

THIS RECOMMENDATION WILL BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE ISSUE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. NO PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF THE DOCUMENT SHOULD BE MADE BEFORE THAT DATE.