

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: May 2, 1976

Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-76-8 through H-76-10

On July 1, 1975, at 10:35 a.m., a Winnebago motor home traveling south on Interstate 75 ran off the highway and crashed, near Monroe, Michigan. The motor home left the roadway, struck the end section of a guardrail, then struck a concrete bridge column and caught fire almost immediately. Two filled 40-pound propane tanks became detached from the vehicle. The hand valves on the tanks were open. Witnesses reported explosions before and as the vehicle burned.

There were 10 occupants, including the driver, in the mobile home. The driver and a passenger, neither of whom was wearing a seatbelt, were ejected through the front of the vehicle. Another passenger escaped from the vehicle unassisted. The seven remaining passengers did not escape and perished in the fire.

The Safety Board's investigation revealed three problems dealing with recreational vehicle safety.

First, had the driver been seatbelted, he probably would have remained inside the motor home, where he could have aided those who were trapped. This is also true of the passenger who was seated behind the driver and who also was ejected. This accident demonstrates the need for motor home drivers to wear seatbelts because they not only have a responsibility to themselves, but to other occupants in the vehicle.

Second, the hand valves on both propane tanks were open because propane was being used to operate the refrigerator; this allowed propane to escape after the accident. It is believed the propane contributed to the vehicle fire and explosions. There are several methods which can be used to prevent this unwanted escape of propane. The recreational vehicle industry has published construction standards (heating, plumbing, electrical, fire and safety) for recreational vehicles. Some of the standards specify requirements for propane container valves, accessories, and safety relief devices. However, there are no requirements that concern stoppage of propane should the regulator or service lines become damaged, as occurred in this accident.

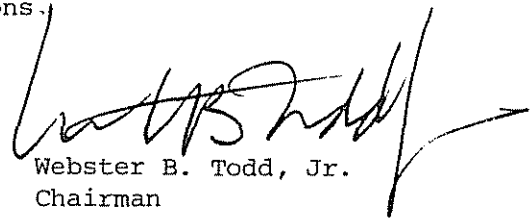
Third, the refrigerator became detached from its mounting and blocked the aisle of the motor home. This motor home had only one avenue of escape, through the front door. The refrigerator also fell on top of one of the passengers. Appliances in recreational vehicles must remain fixed in place for several reasons: (a) the size of the appliances can block the aisle of the motor home, (b) an appliance could be propelled against any of the passengers, resulting in incapacitating injuries, entrapment, or both, and (c) their propane or electrical service lines could become detached or damaged if an appliance does not remain fixed.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association:

1. Amend the Standard for Recreational Vehicles (A119.2) to require some method of assuring that the supply of propane be contained temporarily should the tank valves, regulators, or service lines become damaged. (H-76-8) (Class II, Priority Followup)
2. Conduct an engineering study through its membership to determine the best methods of securing appliances in recreational vehicles and amend the Standard for Recreational Vehicles (A119.2) to specify these methods. (H-76-9) (Class II, Priority Followup)
3. Conduct a safety campaign to emphasize to the occupants of motor homes the benefits of seatbelts, and urge manufacturers of motor homes to print information in the owner's manual stressing the benefits of seatbelts. (H-76-10) (Class II, Priority Followup)

TODD, Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members,
concurred in the above recommendations.

By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Webster B. Todd, Jr.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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