

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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ISSUED: January 12, 1978

Forwarded to:

Honorable Brock Adams
Secretary
Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-77-42

On August 20, 1976, a tractor-semitrailer leased to the Long Transportation Company (Long) of Detroit, Michigan, was descending a steep grade in Valley View, Ohio, when it collided with 10 automobiles that were stopped at a traffic signal at the bottom of the grade. Eight of the 27 automobile occupants died and 15 were injured. 1/

The tractor, a semitrailer, and the services of a driver, (the owner-operator) had been trip leased to Long (one trip) by Frostways, Inc., (Frostways) of Detroit. According to the Long Manifest and Trip Lease, the accident tractor and a Brown semitrailer were presented to Long for its pre-lease inspection in South Kearney, New Jersey. No discrepancies were noted for either vehicle. According to the truckdriver's daily logs, he drove to Stamford, Connecticut, picked up the Long cargo and headed for Detroit. When the accident occurred in Valley View, the tractor was pulling a Trailmobile semitrailer which was leased to Frostways, not the Brown semitrailer identified in the Manifest and Trip Lease. Long informed the Safety Board that the Manifest and Trip Lease had been prepared for the wrong semitrailer. This discrepancy was not noticed at the time of the pre-lease inspection.

1/ For more information about this accident read: "Highway Accident Report--Long Transportation Company Tractor-Semitrailer Collision With Multiple Vehicles, Valley View, Ohio, August 20, 1976," (NTSB-HAR-77-3).

A post-accident examination of the tractor indicated that it was not equipped with front wheel brakes and that the bogie axle brakes were improperly adjusted. An examination of the brake system on the semitrailer showed that the brake drums were badly scored with significant lips at the drum openings. The four brake shoe anchor pins on the rear tandem axle brakes were rusted or otherwise corroded and were inoperable. This condition prevented any rear brake application. The left front-axle wheel bearing was not lubricated. All of the slack adjusters were well beyond the point where they should have been readjusted. Of the eight brakes available on this combination vehicle, two were inoperable and the other six were marginal.

Frostways could produce no maintenance records for either the tractor or the semitrailer. It was determined that the brake shoes on the tractor were those originally installed by the manufacturer. Even though the tractor had been driven more than 68,000 miles, the linings showed relatively minor wear. The condition of the rear-axle brakes on the semitrailer indicates that neither pretrip inspections by the driver nor preventive maintenance by the carrier had been conducted recently. Had Long conducted a complete pre-lease inspection the discrepancy in the vehicle identification on the Manifest and Trip Lease would have been discovered. During a proper inspection the improperly adjusted and partially inoperable brake systems should have been discovered and corrected. If the truckdriver had conducted a proper pretrip inspection, found the marginal brake adjustments on the tractor and inoperable brakes on the semitrailer, and refused to drive the unsafe vehicle as provided for by Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulation 49 CFR 392.7, the accident could have been avoided. Also, if Frostways had conducted the preventive maintenance programs required by 49 CFR 396.2, the condition of the tractor and semitrailer brake systems would have been discovered and corrected prior to the trip lease to Long.

The Safety Board realizes that the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS) has limited resources for commercial vehicle inspections. As a result of these limitations the BMCS was able to inspect less than 1 percent of the estimated 4 million interstate commercial vehicles in 1975. 2/ In 1975 there was only one safety inspector for every 32,000 interstate commercial vehicles. 3/

2/ Report to the Congress by the Comptroller General of the United States, May 6, 1977: "The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Program: Not Yet Achieving What the Congress Wanted."

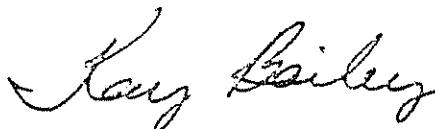
3/ Ibid.

Therefore the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U. S. Department of Transportation:

Seek the necessary funding from the Congress to increase the resources of the Federal Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety to enable it to increase its activities devoted to the roadside inspection of commercial motor vehicles and the safety compliance survey of carrier operations. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-77-42)

The Safety Board will assist in any way possible with information for your budget request.

BAILEY, Acting Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and KING, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kay Bailey".

By: Kay Bailey
Acting Chairman

