

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 26, 1978

Forwarded to:

Mr. C. Whitlock Bennett, Jr.
President
American Trucking Associations, Inc.
1616 P Street, N.W.
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-78-65 and 66

On the afternoon of June 20, 1977, closure of a through lane in a construction zone on southbound I-75 south of the city of Atlanta, Georgia, resulted in traffic delays on that roadway. As traffic volumes increased at 3:00 p.m., congestion caused traffic to back up throughout the I-75 southbound construction zone, as well as the section of I-75 southbound before the construction zone. The area included the I-75 and I-285 interchange which was located just southeast of the Atlanta International (Hartsfield) Airport. That congestion resulted in the formation of a queue back through the acceleration lane from the I-285 eastbound to the I-75 southbound connecting ramp. The queue then extended up the ramp, past the deceleration lane of I-285 eastbound, and onto the I-285 eastbound right, through lane for about 1/2 mile west of the interchange.

An eastbound tractor-semitrailer combination unit approached the standing traffic between 35 and 45 mph and collided with and overrode the last automobile in the queue. The automobile was pushed into the vehicle ahead and two other vehicles to its front were subsequently involved. No fire ensued. Four persons in the first automobile were killed and one other was hospitalized. A second driver was injured slightly.

The roadway alignment in this area is such that aircraft in their final approaches to runways 27L and 33 at Atlanta International Airport overfly the roadway at low altitudes.

The tractor-semitrailer combination unit (truck) was owned by Cates Trucking, Inc., of Swayzee, Indiana. The truck was being operated by Cates under a trip-lease agreement with J. H. Ware Trucking, Inc., of Fulton, Missouri, an Interstate Commerce Commission authorized for-hire motor common carrier.

Postcrash inspections revealed that the truck was well maintained with no apparent mechanical defects. The brakes were found to be in good condition and properly adjusted.

The 27-year-old truckdriver had been employed by Cates Trucking, Inc., since January 1977. He held a valid Indiana Chauffeur's license as required for the operation of a vehicle of the truck's size and weight configuration. Indiana authorities reported no traffic violation convictions on his driver's record. The driver stated that before this accident, he had been involved in one accident in 1972 and since had no additional incidents. He was medically qualified to drive based on a postaccident examination; however, he was operating with a forged medical certificate.

On June 19, 1977, the truckdriver left the Cates terminal in Swayzee, Indiana, and traveled without a semitrailer about 16 miles to Kohomo, Indiana, where he picked up a loaded semitrailer. The cargo was destined for Tampa, Florida, with an intermediate drop in Jacksonville, Florida. A reconstruction of the driver's trip based on the driver's log, service receipts, witness statements, and trip records indicated that this driver had exceeded both the on-duty hours and driving hours. He had driven about 608 miles following his last 8 consecutive hours off duty at the time of the accident. During a 26-hour period, he had been driving for 11 1/2 hours and on duty -- not driving -- for 14 1/2 hours. The driver carried two log books, neither of which was accurate.

The Safety Board believes that if the truckdriver had been attentive to traffic conditions and kept his eyes on the traffic ahead, the accident would have been avoided. The truckdriver stated that he was aware of slowing traffic. Also, he was probably more than 2 1/2 car lengths behind the traffic ahead of him when he "glanced" at a low flying aircraft, because traffic ahead had already stopped before he redirected his attention from the aircraft to the traffic ahead. In his fatigued condition, his perception and reaction capabilities were probably so deteriorated that it took him longer to comprehend and react to the traffic condition ahead.

Interstate carriers should closely supervise their drivers to insure that they are conforming to the hours of service regulations. Drivers who take advantage of long runs and lack of supervision create traffic hazards and should be corrected by their supervisors. It is true that drivers can falsify logs and that it takes time and effort to reconstruct actual trip conditions and travel times from receipts and waybills; however, it can and should be done. The Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety must increase its surveillance of motor carrier operations under their jurisdiction and assure that they are in compliance with existing regulations for driver qualifications and hours of service. Resources are often not available through State law enforcement agencies or through the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety to enforce the regulations. The carrier must accept its responsibility for the conduct of its drivers. The degree of responsibility for the safe movement of its vehicles should be paramount in a carrier's planning and operations.

The American trucking industry has an extensive safety organization dedicated to the safety of truck operations and to the improvement of driver performance. These programs include cooperative road patrols, truck-stop safety meetings, distribution of training and safety literature, and truck "roadeos." The American Trucking Associations, Inc., should make more aggressive and extensive uses of these programs to improve compliance with the regulations and to provide for safer operational programs through improved supervision.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Trucking Associations, Inc., its affiliates, and trucking members:

Emphasize educational programs at the State, regional, and national levels to bring about a better understanding of, and compliance with, the safety regulations and safety practices of truck operators, especially small carriers performing for-hire or private carriage service. (Class I, Urgent Action) (H-78-65)

Conduct a special study to determine if there are other techniques and programs which may be developed and utilized on an industrywide basis to improve driver knowledge and conduct. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-78-66)

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



By: James B. King
Chairman

