



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
**Safety Recommendation**

SP-20  
log #474

**Date:** July 14, 1986  
**In reply refer to:** H-86-12

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On July 5, 1984, a tractor-semitrailer was following a car too closely on wet pavement near Ashdown, Arkansas. When the car slowed suddenly, the truck had to brake hard to avoid hitting it. The truck jackknifed, and the tractor rotated into the oncoming lane and struck a police car. All four police officers in the struck vehicle were killed. 1/

A tractor-semitrailer collided head-on with a church van in Lemoore, California, on October 8, 1982, killing all but 1 of the van's 11 occupants. There had been a stalled car blocking the truck's lane at an intersection. Instead of slowing down, the truck driver attempted to go around the car, and he lost control of the combination vehicle in the process. 2/

These are examples of the heavy truck 3/ accidents investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board in which driver performance was a major factor. The operation of heavy trucks places special demands on the driver, demands he or she may

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1/ Highway Accident Report--"Collision of DeQueen, Arkansas, Police Department Patrol Car and Terrell Trucking, Inc., Tractor-Semitrailer, U.S. Route 71, Ashdown, Arkansas, July 5, 1984" (NTSB/HAR-84/07).

2/ Highway Accident Report--"J.C. Sales, Inc., Tractor-Semitrailer and Calvary Baptist Church Van Collision, State Route 198 at 19th Avenue near Lemoore, California, October 8, 1982" (NTSB/HAR-83/02).

3/ According to the definition used by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, all of the following are considered heavy trucks: 1) single-unit (or "straight") truck with gross vehicle weight greater than 26,000 pounds; 2) tractor-trailer combination; 3) truck pulling one or more cargo trailers; and 4) tractor pulling no trailer. A medium truck is any single-unit truck with a gross vehicle weight between 10,000 and 26,000 pounds. While this recommendation letter deals generally with drivers of heavy trucks, many of the observations apply also to those driving medium ones. Light vehicles, such as pickup trucks, are excluded.

not always be able to meet. Long stopping distances, the possibility of brake fade on steep hills, restricted maneuverability, cargo shifting, and the danger of jackknifing are only a few of the problems that drivers of heavy trucks must face constantly, but which automobile drivers experience rarely, if at all.

Truck driving is a specialized skill, distinct in many ways, and more demanding than operating a smaller vehicle, such as a car. However, far too many people are able to enter the field without having first acquired that skill. The Safety Board has completed a study that examines the system that prepares candidates for employment as truck drivers and then initially places them into service. <sup>4/</sup> The objective of the study was to identify weaknesses in the system, to describe current efforts for improvement, and to offer recommendations for ways to augment those efforts.

Formal training is the most reliable way to learn the special skills required for safe truck driving. Such training is available from proprietary, State, and motor carrier-owned schools, but at present, there are few safeguards to ensure quality of instruction and insufficient incentives for a prospective truck driver to enroll in any school.

The Department of Transportation's Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety (BMCS) recently published proposed minimum standards against which all truck driver training schools could be measured, but the standards cannot be used for that purpose until their validity has been tested with actual schools and students. The Safety Board has urged that such field testing commence as soon as possible. Once properly validated standards are available, the Board believes a system should be adopted for assessing schools against them and for directing prospective students to those schools that measure up favorably.

Substantially upgrading the instruction offered by training schools cannot be expected to improve truck safety if sufficient incentives remain lacking for truck drivers to attend those schools. The Safety Board, therefore, has determined that a requirement of formal training should be established for truck drivers. That requirement should stipulate not only that prospective truck drivers obtain instruction, but also that they demonstrate before graduating that they have mastered the skills being taught.

The Safety Board has recommended that a training requirement for truck drivers, based on the BMCS Standards, be incorporated into the Federal rules that regulate interstate truck operations. To reach all drivers, including those who operate within a single State and, therefore are not covered by the Federal regulations, the Safety Board has also recommended that the training requirement be made one of the criteria for obtaining a proposed national truck driver license. Once such requirements are in place, an accreditation system will be needed to identify those schools that meet the standards.

With such regulatory changes in place, it would be the legal obligation of motor carriers to hire only drivers with certificates showing they successfully mastered the skills taught in an approved course of driving instruction. But motor carriers do not have to wait for new regulations to start improving truck drivers' performance and training level. Trucking firms can start immediately to hire only drivers who have successfully completed formal training. Once there are uniform curriculum standards and an accreditation program applying them authoritatively, the companies should hire only graduates from accredited programs. In the case of drivers who own their own trucks, shippers should require the same of the drivers with whom they contract.

<sup>4/</sup> Safety Study--"Training, Licensing, and Qualification Standards for Drivers of Heavy Trucks" (NTSB/SS-86/02).

An upgraded training system can be expected to produce increasingly skilled, new drivers. The more a person learns in training about proper truck handling, the less he or she will have to learn in service. Nevertheless, the instructive role of experience is unlikely to be eliminated. When a new driver is just beginning to build up on-the-job experience, qualified supervision can help ensure that he or she develops only safe driving habits. Such supervision also can minimize the risk to the driver or to others on the road. An effective way of supervising new drivers would be through an apprenticeship program. There is currently no such nationally organized program in the United States, but the Safety Board has recommended that one be established. If it is, its success will depend on widespread participation by members of the trucking industry.

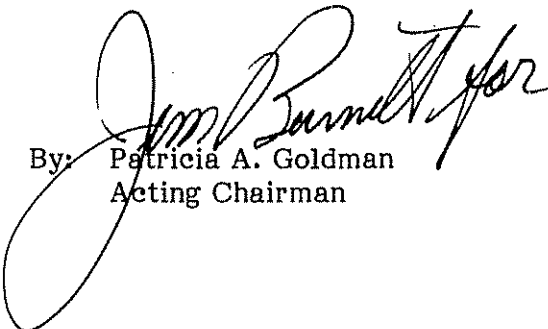
There is a role for the insurance industry in providing incentives for motor to take these steps. It is in the interest of both insurer and insured to reduce the number of claims, and one way of doing that could be to improve driver performance through upgraded training and through the use of apprenticeship programs. Insurance companies could offer lower premiums to policy holders who hire only drivers with formal training, or insurance companies could make such practice a condition of coverage. A similar approach could be used to promote apprenticeship programs.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the American Insurance Association, the Alliance of American Insurers, the National Association of Independent Insurers, and the Insurance Services Office, Inc.:

Undertake a program encouraging member companies to offer financial incentives such as reduced premiums to motor carrier policy holders whose drivers have received formal training. Once the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety Proposed Minimum Standards for Training Tractor-Trailer Drivers have been validated, stipulate that the training be conducted in programs that meet the Standards. Encourage member companies to offer similar incentives for drivers who have participated in apprenticeship programs once such programs become available.  
(Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-12)

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 actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendation in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendation H-86-12 in your reply.

GOLDMAN, Acting Chairman, and BURNETT, LAUBER, and NALL, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

By:   
Patricia A. Goldman  
Acting Chairman