



Friday, December 1, 2006

NTSB Recommends Ban on Cell Phone Use By Bus Drivers

In a final report on a motor coach accident in Virginia, the National Transportation Safety Board today urged the federal and state governments to prohibit motor coach and school bus drivers from using cell phones while driving those vehicles, except in emergencies.

"Professional drivers who have dozens of passengers' lives entrusted to them should devote their full attention to their task," NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker said. "What we saw in this accident is appalling and could have resulted in great tragedy."

The recommendations are contained in the Board's report on a non-fatal bus accident that occurred November 14, 2004, on the George Washington Parkway in Alexandria, Virginia. The motor coach was traveling from Baltimore Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport to Mount Vernon, Virginia. The accident bus was the second of two traveling together. At about 10:40 a.m., the bus was traveling in the right lane of the Parkway when it struck a bridge carrying Alexandria Avenue over the Parkway. There were signs warning of the 10-foot, 2-inch clearance for that lane and the 13-foot, 4-inch clearance for the left lane. The bus was 12 feet high. During the impact the bus's roof was destroyed and 11 students were injured, one of them seriously. The bus driver had been talking on a hands-free cell phone at the time of the accident, and he said that he saw neither the warning signs nor the bridge itself before the impact. Evidence indicates that he did not apply any brakes before impacting the bridge.

The Safety Board concluded that the driver's cognitive distraction resulting from his use of a hands-free cell phone caused the accident. The use of either a hand-held or hands-free cellular telephone while driving can impair the performance of even a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) holder, such as the driver in this accident, the Board said.

"Payment for transportation services creates an implicit contract between the passenger and the carrier that the carrier will transport the passenger safely and not allow the vehicle operator to take unnecessary risks," the Board stated in its report. "Consequently, these drivers have a special obligation to provide the safest driving environment possible for the passengers in their care."

The Board recommended that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the 50 States and District of Columbia prohibit CDL holders with a passenger-carrying or school bus endorsement from using cell phones while driving those vehicles, except in emergencies. The Board also recommended that the bus associations develop formal policies for their members containing the same proscriptions.

The Board noted that the extent of the problem of cell phone use is unknown because of inadequate statistics, and the Board reiterated previous recommendations to the 20 states that do not have driver distraction codes on their accident investigation forms to add interactive wireless communication device use to those forms.

In its report, the NTSB also found that the low vertical clearance of the bridge, which does not meet current standards, contributed to the accident.

A summary of the Board's findings, including conclusions, probable cause and safety recommendations, may be found on the Board's website under "Publications." The full report will be available at that site in a few weeks.

Vice Chairman Sumwalt addresses the National Foundation for Women Legislators



On Saturday, November 18, Vice Chairman Sumwalt addressed the National Foundation for Women Legislators at their annual conference in Colorado. The Vice Chairman used this opportunity to highlight outstanding recommendations on the Board's list of Most Wanted safety improvements including Graduated Driver's Licensing, Hard Core Drinking and Driving, Primary Seat Belt Enforcement and Child Passenger Safety.

In his remarks the Vice Chairman noted that over 43,000 people a year are killed in highway accidents but as legislators they have the power to implement the Board's recommendations to make the highways safer. He concluded by noting, "The real heroes in this effort are you, the legislators who work with us. Quite simply, your actions save lives and reduce injuries."

NTSB Releases Final Report On Crash Of Corporate Jet In Houston

The National Transportation Safety Board has released its final report on the crash of a corporate jet in Houston in 2004 that killed three crewmembers. The plane was on its way to pick up former President George H.W. Bush for a flight to Ecuador when it crashed. The two pilots and a flight attendant were the only persons aboard the plane when it crashed.

On November 22, 2004, a Gulfstream G-1159A (N85VT), operated by Business Jet Services Ltd., struck a light pole and crashed about 3 miles southwest of William P. Hobby Airport in Houston while on an instrument landing system approach to runway 4.

The Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the crash was the flight crew's failure to adequately monitor and cross check the flight instruments during the approach. Contributing to the accident was the flight crew's failure to select the instrument landing system frequency in a timely manner and to adhere to approved company approach procedures, including the stabilized approach criteria.

"It is imperative that flight crews maintain their vigilance constantly during all phases of flight," NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker said. "The circumstances of this accident support the Board's effort to have the Federal Aviation Administration include mandatory crew resource management training in Part 135 operations. This issue was added to the Board's Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements last week."

The complete accident report is on the NTSB's web site and may be accessed at the following link: <http://www.nts.gov/publicctn/publicctn.htm>, go to Most Recent Aviation Accidents.

John Clark Assumes New Scientific Post; Tom Haueter Named Acting Director Of Aviation Safety; Dr. Evan Byrne Named Acting Deputy Director of Aviation Safety

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark V. Rosenker recently announced that he has named John Clark, formerly Director of Aviation Safety, as the agency's Chief Scientist for Aeronautical Engineering. Tom Haueter, Deputy Director of Aviation Safety (AS), has been named Acting Director of the office, and Dr. Evan Byrne has been named the Acting Deputy Director of Aviation Safety. Evan will continue to be Chief of the Human Performance Division while filling in as Acting Deputy Director.



Clark

"I've asked John to take on these new duties to increase our focus on technical oversight of our work," Chairman Rosenker said. "I look forward to continuing to work with him closely in the future, and am happy that someone of Tom Haueter's abilities is available to fill John's old position."

John Clark joined the Board in 1981 as an aeronautical engineer and served in several investigative capacities. He has served as Director of Aviation Safety for the last 6 years.

Tom Haueter came to the Board in 1983 and has served as a structures investigator, an Investigator-in-Charge, as head of the major investigations division and as Deputy Director of AS for 6 years.



Haueter



Byrne

Dr. Evan Byrne has been employed at the Safety Board since June 1996. He has served as Chief of the Human Performance Division since February 2001 and has previously held the positions of Senior Human Performance Investigator and Aviation Psychologist in the Human Performance Division.

The appointments are effective immediately.

New Generation of Photocopiers on the Way!

Improved photocopier service is on the horizon! The Office of Administration, in cooperation with the Chief Information Officer, are striving to improve photocopying and printing services for NTSB staff by implementing a lease contract for new Multi-Functional Devices (MFD's). These machines, which include photocopier, network printer, fax and scan capabilities, will replace the current aging inventory of photocopiers at NTSB headquarters and regional offices. Cost savings will be realized through central management of supplies and services, and consolidation of four service agreements to one single vendor. The solicitation was released on November 22, and offers are due on December 21. Administration will host a pre-proposal conference on December 7, to present the requirement to potential offers and answer questions. The goal is to have new machines in place at all locations by February 2007.

