



Friday, July 11, 2008

NTSB Cites Highway and Driver Issues in Motorcoach Accident



The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of a crash that occurred on an elevated highway ramp in Atlanta, Georgia was the motorcoach driver's mistaking an Interstate high occupancy vehicle (HOV)-only left exit ramp for an HOV through lane. Contributing to the driver's mistake was the failure of the Georgia Department of Transportation to install adequate traffic control devices to identify and distinguish the two different HOV lanes. Contributing to the severity of the accident was the motorcoach's lack of an adequate occupant protection system.

"This accident demonstrates the need for clear and consistent highway signage and traffic devices across the U.S. interstate system, in order to provide reliable guidance to all motorists on our nation's highways," said Mark V. Rosenker, NTSB chairman. "In addition, the NTSB continues to call for a motorcoach passenger protection system which could reduce the number of fatalities and the severity of injuries suffered in accidents like this one in Atlanta."

On Friday, March 2, 2007, a 2000 VanHool T2145 57-passenger motorcoach operated by Executive Coach Luxury Travel, Inc., transporting 33 members of the Bluffton University (Ohio) baseball team, exited the HOV lane of Interstate 75 in Atlanta, Georgia, entered an intersection on an overpass, overrode a bridge wall, and fell 19 feet onto the southbound lanes of the Interstate. Seven motorcoach occupants were killed: the driver, the driver's wife, and five passengers. Seven other motorcoach passengers received serious injuries, and 21 passengers received minor injuries.

As a result of its investigation, the NTSB made five recommendations to the Federal Highway Administration regarding the uniformity of specific requirements, standards and criteria in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. The NTSB also made five recommendations to the Georgia Department of Transportation regarding signage improvements.

The Board also reiterated four previous recommendations made in 1999 to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration regarding the need for improved motorcoach occupant protection systems and the installation of on-board recording systems that record vehicle parameters and crash data.

Investigative Team Sent to Arizona for EMS Mid-Air Collision



The Safety Board sent a team to investigate a mid-air collision of two emergency medical service (EMS) helicopters in Flagstaff, Arizona. Chairman Mark V. Rosenker accompanied the team and served as principal spokesman for the on-scene investigation. Senior Air Safety Investigator Aaron Sauer (AS-CEN) was designated as Investigator-in-Charge. Keith Holloway accompanied the team as press officer, and three representatives of the Board's Transportation Disaster Assistance office, Erik Grosf, Paul Slezdik and Elias Kontanis also accompanied the team to assist with the families. Additional NTSB staff on-scene included: Tom Doyle (Office of the Chairman); Ron Price (AS-40); Leah Yeager (AS-CEN); Dave Muzio (AS-ERA); and Paul Schuda (MD-4).

On June 29th at about 3:48 p.m. Mountain Standard Time, two Bell 407 EMS helicopters (N407GA operated by Air Methods, and N407MJ operated by Classic Helicopters) collided less than a mile from the Flagstaff Medical Center while both approached the hospital for landing. There were 7 fatalities as a result of this accident.

Chairman Rosenker joins the investigative team on-scene



Chairman Rosenker and Aaron Sauer, IIC, address the media at a press conference

Office of Aviation Safety Investigates Recent Occurrences

The Office of Aviation Safety has launched on three recent high-profile occurrences both in the U.S. and abroad. On July 6, a DC-9-15 freighter (N199US), operated by USA Jet Airlines, crashed on approach to the Saltillo Airport, Saltillo, Mexico, about 2:15 a.m. EDT. There were two persons aboard the cargo airplane. The captain was killed and the first officer was critically injured. There are no reported injuries on the ground. Chairman Rosenker designated senior investigator Robert Benzoni as the U.S. Accredited Representative and he was accompanied by technical specialists in the areas of aircraft systems and meteorology. The U.S. team also included technical advisors from the FAA, Boeing, and Pratt & Whitney.

The following day, at about 2:52 a.m. EDT, a cargo aircraft (N714CK), operated by Kalitta Airlines as a wet lease to Centurion Airlines, crashed shortly after takeoff from El Dorado International Airport, Bogota, Colombia. The Colombian government requested assistance from the United States, as the country of design and manufacture of the airplane and engines. Dennis Jones was designated the Accredited Representative for this accident. His team includes four other NTSB investigators, as well as representatives from the Federal Aviation Administration, Boeing and Pratt & Whitney Engines.

Also on July 7, a chartered airliner carrying Senator Barack Obama made an uneventful precautionary landing in St. Louis due to a suspected flight control anomaly. At about 9:30 a.m. CDT, a McDonnell Douglas MD-81 airplane (N804ME), operated by Midwest Airlines as Flight 8663, diverted to St. Louis, Missouri, during a flight from Chicago, Illinois to Charlotte, North Carolina. There were no injuries to the 48 passengers and crew. Todd Fox was designated as the Investigator-in-Charge for this incident. Preliminary information indicated that the crew disconnected the autopilot during climbout from Chicago, while being vectored around thunderstorms, when they reportedly felt elevator control forces that were heavier than normal. They elected to make a precautionary landing at St. Louis. After landing, it was learned that the aft emergency exit slide had deployed within the tail cone. The tail cone did not separate from the airplane. Evidence shows marks on the slide consistent with rubbing of elevator control cables. Additionally, a broken catwalk railing impinged on elevator control cables. There was no evidence of tampering, nor of missing components.

Deployed emergency exit slide inside of the tail cone of Midwest Airlines' MD-81



Vice Chairman Sumwalt Discusses Safety Culture at PHMSA

Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt delivered a presentation on Safety Culture at the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) on July 9th. The vice chairman was invited to speak on the topic at PHMSA's headquarter building for the purpose of creating a training video for the agency's employees.

Vice Chairman Sumwalt noted that the NTSB has long advocated safety culture, highlighting a 1997 symposium hosted by the Board. He stated, "safety culture means doing the right thing, even when no one is looking." However, in quoting James Reason, he also cautioned, "...a safety culture is something that is striven for but rarely attained..." it is the process or the way that an organization attempts to achieve safety, that matters.

The vice chairman described safety culture in detail, providing examples of pipeline accidents investigated by the NTSB in which the individual safety culture components of "informed culture, reporting culture, just culture and learning culture" were found lacking and accidents occurred as a result. He also cited the Lautman-Gallimore Findings for Best Practices in creating a safety culture. The study found that management is obligated to set an example and take safety seriously themselves before safety culture can permeate through an organization and there must be standardization and discipline for all safety measures. Quality control programs must be in place in addition to training programs to establish all of the aspects of a well-run safety organization.

In his presentation, Vice Chairman Sumwalt highlighted an important objective of safety culture which is not only to understand the underlying causes or reasons for safety problems but also to learn from prior mistakes to prevent the same thing from happening in the future.

Member Hersman Addresses Transportation Law Professionals

Member Debbie Hersman addressed the 79th annual meeting of the Association of Transportation Law Professionals in Williamsburg, VA on June 30. Her presentation about fatigue in transportation included findings from investigations of accidents in various modes where the Board found that fatigue was a factor. Member Hersman was joined by eight other transportation professionals who formed two panels to discuss regulatory and operational issues associated with fatigue and hours of service regulations in all modes of transportation.