



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Safety Recommendation

*Log H-480A*

**Date:** September 16, 1986

**In reply refer to:** H-86-68 and -69

Honorable Ray A. Barnhart  
Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
Washington D. C. 20590

About 7:51 p.m. on June 21, 1985, a privately-owned, 70,000-pound tractor-semitrailer operating in interstate commerce under a trip-lease agreement with C. Maxwell Trucking Company, Inc., lost control while descending a steep 3,439-foot grade on southbound State Route (SR) 59 in downtown Van Buren, Arkansas. The truck collided with the rear of and overrode a station wagon which was stopped at the bottom of the hill. The truck and the station wagon continued 84 feet forward, across an intersection, up a curb, and through a guardrail. They then traveled another 22 feet and struck two commercial buildings. A fire ensued and engulfed both vehicles and three buildings. Both occupants in the truck and the seven occupants in the station wagon were fatally injured. 1/

The left curve sign, the 30-mph speed limit signs, and highway regulatory signs which prohibited truck traffic on southbound SR 59 were clearly visible. Although the regulatory sign at the deceleration ramp from Interstate 40 (I-40) onto SR 59 had been removed temporarily by a sewer construction crew, the truckdriver should have responded to signs posted on I-40 before the hillcrest by pulling off the roadway and turning around to avoid descending the grade.

It is possible that the truckdriver either failed to see the available regulatory signs due to the effects of alcohol in his system, or that he purposely disregarded the signs at the top of the hill that prohibited trucks on southbound SR 59. However, the removal of the regulatory sign on SR 59 just south of the I-40 ramp prohibiting truck traffic on SR 59 might have been a factor in this accident. The location of the sign was significant because the truckdriver would have had to stop, or at least slow down, before turning right onto southbound SR 59, and he would have had time to recognize and react to the hazard ahead. The sign was 1.2 miles in advance of the hill, and several pull-off or turnaround areas were available. Safety Board investigators examined the construction

1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report—"Tractor-Semitrailer/Station Wagon Runaway, Collision, and Fire, Van Buren, Arkansas, June 21, 1985" (NTSB/HAR-86/03).

permit and determined that there were no specific provisions for maintaining in-place highway signs during construction. The Board believes that the proper maintenance of signs and traffic control devices is essential, especially during road construction.

The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (ASHTD) is considering changes in future highway-related construction utility permits which may include provisions requiring adequate traffic control during periods of construction. In this regard, the Safety Board urges that, for future project specifications and permits, the ASHTD specifically require the maintenance of all traffic signs unless removal is approved by the responsible government traffic engineer. Furthermore, the Safety Board believes that the Federal Highway Administration should modify the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices to include specific language relative to the maintenance of signing during construction projects and to the signing of roadways where commercial vehicle traffic is prohibited. These modifications would provide a uniform set of guidelines nationwide.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Highway Administration:

Modify the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices to include specific language that requires contractors to maintain highway regulatory signs during periods of construction on or adjacent to the roadway. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-68)

Evaluate existing techniques used by States to prohibit commercial vehicles from routes, determine the effectiveness of various strategies, and then revise the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-86-69)

Also, the Safety Board made Safety Recommendations H-86-65 through -67 to the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety, H-86-70 to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, and H-86-71 to the Governors of the States of Alaska, Florida, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in these recommendations.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman