

# Accident Investigators Want Talking Car Tech

Joan Lowy, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government should set performance standards for new safety technology that allows cars and trucks to talk to each other and then require the technology be installed in all new vehicles, a federal accident investigation board recommended Tuesday.

The National Transportation Safety Board made the recommendation in response to fatal school bus accidents at intersections in New Jersey and Florida last year.

Vehicles equipped with the technology can continuously communicate over wireless networks, exchanging information on location, direction and speed 10 times a second. The vehicle's computer analyzes the information and issues danger warnings to drivers, often before they can see the other vehicle.

The technology, which is being road-tested in Ann Arbor, Mich., is effective up to a range of about 1,000 feet.

"This technology more than anything else holds great promise to protect lives and prevent injuries," NTSB Chairman Deborah Hersman said. She added that was particularly true of crashes at intersections like the two school bus accidents.

But an auto industry official said the board was acting precipitously.

"The technology is still being assessed," said Gloria Bergquist, vice president of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers. "It's too early to call for a mandate."

In the New Jersey accident in February 2012, a dump truck slammed into the rear left side of a school bus at an intersection near Chesterfield, spinning the bus around until it collided with a pole. An 11-year-old girl was killed and five other students were seriously injured.

The next month in Port St. Lucie, Fla., a semi tractor-trailer truck hit a school bus on a rear side, killing one student and seriously injuring four others.

The board was meeting to determine the probable cause of the New Jersey accident and to make safety recommendations, but because of the similarities in the two crashes findings from the previously concluded Florida accident investigation were also considered.

The New Jersey accident was caused by the school bus driver's failure to note the oncoming dump truck when he pulled into the intersection, the board said. The bus driver had stopped part way into the intersection to get a better view of traffic coming from the left — the direction from which the dump truck — came and should have been able to see the truck, investigators said.

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Instead, he pulled into the intersection anyway. The board concluded that the bus driver experienced "inattention blindness" — he saw, but didn't register, that he was seeing, a truck coming because he was suffering from fatigue and the sedating effects of several prescription medications.

The driver reported that he had only five hours of sleep for each of the preceding three nights, investigators said.

The dump truck driver and the trucking company he worked for also contributed to the severity of the accident, the board said.

The truck was traveling between 53 mph to 58 mph in a 45 mph speed zone, investigators said. Also, a series of problems with the truck's brakes reduced the effectiveness of the vehicles braking by 32 percent, they said. The 85,000-pound truck was also about 5,000 pounds overweight, making it harder to stop and the impact of the crash more severe.

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