

REPORT TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
PUBLIC INQUIRY
THE FATALITY INQUIRIES ACT

CANADA
PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

WHEREAS a Public Inquiry was held at the Provincial Courts Building
in the Town of Strathmore
(City, Town, etc.) (Name of City, Town, etc.)
on the 28th day of February, 1994 (and by adjournment
on the 1st and 2nd day of March, 1994 AND
on the 7th day of November, 1994), before
A. P. Demong, a Provincial Court Judge.

A jury was was not summoned and an Inquiry was held into the death of
Amanda Gowin 5
(Name in Full) (Age)
of 410 McKinnon Dr., Carseland, Alberta and the following findings were made:
(Residence)

Date and Time of Death September 3rd, 1991
Place Highway #24 at the Bow River Bridge, Carseland, Alberta

Medical Cause of Death ("cause of death" means the medical cause of death according to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death as last revised by the International Conference assembled for that purpose and published by the World Health Organization — The Fatality Inquiries Act, Section 1(d))

Severe Burns

Manner of Death ("manner of death" means the mode or method of death whether natural, homicidal, suicidal, accidental or undeterminable — The Fatality Inquiries Act, Section 1(g))

Death caused by severe burns as the result of a fire in the propane-powered school bus after a collision occurred between the school bus and a tractor-trailer unit.

CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH DEATH OCCURRED

Please see Appendix 'A', attached.

Lined area for writing details of the circumstances under which the death occurred.

No. of additional pages attached 6

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION OF SIMILAR DEATHS

An external, manual release mechanism should be equipped on school bus doors.

Lined area for writing recommendations for the prevention of similar deaths.

No. of additional pages attached _____

DATED this 19th day of January, 1995

[Signature]
A Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta

REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FATALITY INQUIRY

In the Matter of the Deaths of:

**RONA GOWIN
AMANDA GOWIN
LEE-ANN NEUFELD**

Rona Gowin, Amanda Gowin and Lee-Ann Neufeld died at approximately 7:50 a.m. on September 3, 1991, approximately 100 feet on the north side of the Bow River Bridge on Highway # 24, near Carseland, Alberta.

These deaths were caused by severe burns as the result of a fire in the propane-powered school bus in which they were travelling after a collision occurred between a tractor-trailer unit and that school bus.

The manner in which these deaths occurred was accidental.

The accident leading to these deaths occurred on a 2-lane primary highway before a bridge crossing the Bow River. Geographically, this is the north base of the riverbanks. Motor vehicle traffic approaches this location after descending a 3 to 4 percent curved downgrade. The roadway straightens and levels to a flat grade before the edge of the bridge. One lane of the bridge crossing the river was closed for construction. A stop line existed 55 metres from the edge of the bridge. A steep embankment protected by guardrail exists off the east side of this portion of the highway.

Traffic lights and barricades were in place and functioning between the stop line and bridge's edge and onto the bridge. Similar signs and barricades existed on the other side of the bridge. Vehicle traffic immediately prior to and on the bridge was thereby restricted by traffic lights to a single lane, one direction at a time.

Numerous, obvious signs warning of construction and limiting speed to 50 kilometres per hour were properly placed from the construction site up to a distance of 3.8 kilometres away.

Road conditions were clear and dry. Weather conditions were clear and sunny. Motorists' vision of the highway and of the construction site was not impaired.

On the morning of September 3, 1991, Merrill Demone, the foreman of the construction site, arrived approximately 20 minutes before the accident occurred. He parked his vehicle on the edge of a gravel road that intersects the highway approximately 130 metres north of the accident site. After inspecting the construction site and determining the satisfactory operation of the traffic lights; he returned to his vehicle and faced away from the highway awaiting the arrival of the construction crew.

On the morning of September 3, 1991, Rona Gowin was operating a 22-seat 1989, GMC school bus owned by the County of Wheatland. This was the first day of school for the year and she was transporting 4 children; Amanda Gowin, Lee-Ann Neufeld, Bradley Reginald Neufeld, and Chantelle Kristin Elizabeth Gowin. She stopped the bus at the stop line before the north side of the bridge.

On the morning of September 3, 1991, a "Super B" dual-trailer tractor unit operated by Walter Donald McCutcheon and owned by Mantei Transport of Red Deer, Alberta left Calgary en route to Lethbridge. This tractor-trailer was fully loaded with 49,000 litres of diesel fuel. The tractor trailer unit travelled down the highway towards the bridge, construction site and school bus at a rate of speed greater than the 50 kilometre-an-hour posted limit. Braking of the tractor-trailer was not adequate to prevent a collision with the rear of the school bus. Collision occurred at 7:49 a.m. with the tractor-trailer unit travelling at approximately 50 to 70 kilometres per hour.

The tractor-trailer unit collided with the rear of the school bus propelling it forward and across the highway, through the highway guardrail, and down a 15 metre embankment. The school bus came to rest in an upright position. After the collision the tractor-trailer unit also travelled across the highway, through the guardrail and down the embankment. It came to rest on its side approximately 75 feet away from the school bus.

The foreman of the construction site, Merrill Demone, heard the sounds of braking and collision. These noises caused Mr. Demone to turn and observe the school bus travelling across the highway and striking the guardrail. He also observed flames erupting from the school bus. He ran from his vehicle to the school bus. He approached the bus and attempted opening the driver's side door unsuccessfully. He observed that the interior of the bus was filled with smoke. He heard screaming and circled to the passenger side where he pulled two children through an open window. One of the children told him that his sister was still in the bus so he attempted to enter the bus by kicking at the entrance doors. The doors would not open and within seconds intense fire and smoke prevented further approach to the bus.

CONCLUSIONS

The severity of the collision in this accident was extraordinary.

If seatbelts had been available for use in this school bus; their use can not be determined to have lessened the loss of life which occurred in this accident.

Neither the construction of this bus; or the location and manner of fuel-tank installation; or the type of fuel used; are factors that can be determined to have contributed to the outcome of this accident.

RECOMMENDATION

An external, manual release mechanism should be equipped on school bus doors.

Anton P. Demong
Provincial Court Judge