

HWY24FH004

HUMAN PERFORMANCE FACTORS

Group Chair's Factual Report - Attachment
Interview Summaries

(8 pages)

Interviewee: Michael Fitzwater, Superintendent, Calhoun County Schools
Mr. Joe Paxton, Transportation Director, Calhoun County Schools

Representative: None

Date/Time: March 13, 2024 / not recorded

Location: Calhoun County Schools
540 Alan B. Mollohan Drive, Mt. Zion, WV 26151

Present: N/A

Investigator: Dennis Collins, Michael LaPonte

During the interview Michael Fitzwater, Superintendent, Calhoun County Schools stated the following:

- Both gentlemen have completed DOT "reasonable suspicion" training.
- Currently, all random DOT testing of the school bus drivers occurs in the morning.
- Mr. Fitzwater sees the school bus drivers every day.
- One driver under contract to Calhoun County Schools (CCS) is trained to be a trainer.
- CCS uses the West Virginia state requirements for the training of their drivers.
- CCS provides professional development to their drivers throughout the year.
- There are three or four professional development days at the start of each school year and approximately one day a month. Each professional development day is 8 hours long.
- None of the CCS buses are equipped with seatbelts. The special education buses are equipped with harnesses and car seats can be used in those buses.
- Two CCS buses are handicapped-capable.
- The drivers are paid hourly.
- The extracurricular runs are assigned by seniority (using a "wheel-board").
- For driver requirements, CCS follows the state-established minimum requirements.
- The driver involved in the crash did the activity (or after-school) route on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.
- The after-school route starts at 5:45 p.m.
- It involves taking kids from the middle/high school to pre-determined drop points, all located on Route 16.
- From the middle/high school, the route goes to the elementary school to pick up additional students before heading to the drop points.
- After all students have been dropped off, the bus is returned to the parking lot at the administration building/garage, behind the middle/high school.

- In the morning, the drivers complete a pre-trip inspection.
- There is an on-site driver's lounge, and the drivers may stop in there.
- The morning runs start between 6:30 and 6:45 a.m.
- All routes have the buses back at the lot by 8:00 a.m.
- The afternoon routes begin between 3:00 to 3:30 p.m.
- The drivers are required to complete post-trip inspections.
- The after-school route began with a pickup at the middle/high school at 5:45 p.m.
- The after-school routes would end with the bus returned to the lot at 7:30 p.m. or later.
- High school and middle school begin at 8:05 a.m. and elementary school begins at 8:00 a.m.
- Routes are created manually each year by the Transportation Director.
- In West Virginia, state law requires school buses be equipped with cameras.
- Neither person interacted with the crash driver before the (after school) run on the day of the crash.
- The crash driver was under contract with CCS, as are all their drivers.

The time the Interview concluded was not recorded.

Interviewee: Richard Trites, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools
Representative: None
Date/Time: March 13, 2024 / not recorded
Location: Calhoun County Schools
540 Alan B. Mollohan Drive, Mt. Zion, WV 26151
Present: N/A
Investigator: Dennis Collins, Michael LaPonte

During the interview Richard Trites, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools stated the following:

- Mr. Trites began driving school buses in 1979.
- He is a substitute driver for Calhoun County Schools and is currently assigned as a long-term substitute for one route.
- He had limited contact with the driver involved in the crash, mostly seeing him at work and occasionally around town (at the store, for example).
- On March 4, 2024, he had returned from the PM route when the crash driver also returned and began to back up to park his bus.
- Mr. Trites thought the crash driver was getting too close to a parked trailer and honked his horn, but the crash driver's bus bumped the trailer.
- Mr. Trites talked to the crash driver through the (open) emergency door of his (Mr. Trites) bus.
- When asked, he stated he did not notice anything odd at that time.
- Mr. Trites stated that, in general, the crash driver kept to himself.

The time the Interview concluded was not recorded.

Interviewee: Jim Sullivan, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools
Representative: None
Date/Time: March 13, 2024 / not recorded
Location: Calhoun County Schools
540 Alan B. Mollohan Drive, Mt. Zion, WV 26151
Present: N/A
Investigator: Dennis Collins, Michael LaPonte

During the interview Jim Sullivan, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools stated the following:

- Mr. Sullivan has been a school bus driver for 5 years.
- He parks his bus approximately 12 miles away (north) from the bus lot.
- At about 3:00 p.m. on March 4, 2024, Mr. Sullivan was in his bus, returning to the bus lot, and was approximately 5 miles away.
- A black car approached his bus from behind and got so close to the bumper of the bus that it was in a blind spot.
- Mr. Sullivan stated the driver of the black car seemed impatient or angry.
- The black car passed him; when he got to the bus lot, he observed the same car parked in the lot and realized the car belonged to the crash driver.
- He encountered the crash driver in the driver room.
- The crash driver was complaining about another driver (not Mr. Sullivan).
- Mr. Sullivan was close to the crash driver and did not detect an odor of alcohol.
- Mr. Sullivan also drives an extracurricular run and follows the crash driver from the bus lot to the middle/high school. They usually depart for the middle/high school at about 3:15 p.m.
- On March 4, 2024, the crash driver stopped to talk. Mr. Sullivan stated the crash driver seemed slower than normal.
- While driving to the middle/high school, Mr. Sullivan noted the crash driver crossed the yellow centerline while traversing a curve.
- Mr. Sullivan described the crash driver as "standoffish".

The time the Interview concluded was not recorded.

Interviewee: Chris Lacy, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools
Representative: None
Date/Time: March 13, 2024 / not recorded
Location: Calhoun County Schools
540 Alan B. Mollohan Drive, Mt. Zion, WV 26151
Present: N/A
Investigator: Dennis Collins, Michael LaPonte

During the interview Chris Lacy, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools stated the following:

- Mr. lacy has been a commercial driver since 1999. He has been a school bus driver for 13 years.
- On March 4, 2024, at about 2:30 p.m. Mr. Lacy was checking his bus.
- The crash driver arrived and approached Mr. Lacy.
- The crash driver was yelling about tires he had purchased from Wal-Mart. Mr. Lacy also described it as "rambling".
- Mr. Lacy smelled an odor, which he stated was either alcohol or a nearby dumpster.
- Mr. lacy and the crash driver talked for approximately 15 minutes and Mr. Lacy did not smell anything else.
- Mr. Lacy went to the garage and the crash driver went to the driver's lounge.
- The crash driver then came to the garage and, as Mr. lacy described it, "flared" again, discussing politics with another driver. Mr. Lacy also stated the crash driver "went off".
- Mr. Lacy stated the crash driver did not come into the garage often, but when he did, he got "worked up".
- Mr. Lacy stated the crash driver has always been unpredictable and has gotten "worked up" over what Mr. Lacy believes are little things.
- Mr. Lacy stated that he was aware of three vehicles operated by the crash driver - a Ford Expedition, and Subaru, and a green Toyota sedan.

The time the Interview concluded was not recorded.

Interviewee: Marshall Bever, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools
Representative: None
Date/Time: March 13, 2024 / not recorded
Location: Calhoun County Schools
540 Alan B. Mollohan Drive, Mt. Zion, WV 26151
Present: N/A
Investigator: Dennis Collins, Michael LaPonte

During the interview Marshall Bever, school bus driver, Calhoun County Schools stated the following:

- Mr. Bever has 21 years as a school bus driver and 8 years as a substitute driver.
- Mr. Bever described the crash driver as "quiet" and "good to work with" and stated he kept to himself.
- Mr. Bever stated that, in general, he was clueless on the crash driver's drinking habits.
- He did state the crash driver's eyes were red on the day of the crash and opined the crash driver may have been "on the juice" for the PM route (3:30 p.m.).
- When Mr. Bever returned after his PM route, the crash driver's bus was already parked in the lot.
- Mr. Bever walked into the driver's lounge with the crash driver in the afternoon of the day of the crash; the crash driver's gait seemed normal.
- The crash driver was upset about tires from Wal-Mart and was telling everyone.
- When it was time to start the after-school run, the crash driver seemed to be slow getting up. Mr. Bever recalled the crash driver being slow to get up prior to the PM run as well.

The time the Interview concluded was not recorded.

Interviewee: Michele Sears
Representative: None
Date/Time: July 11, 2024 / 11:00 a.m. (EDT)
Location: Via telephone at [REDACTED]
Present: N/A
Investigator: Dennis Collins

During the interview, Ms. Michele Sears, witness, stated the following:

- Ms. Sears confirmed her phone number.
- She resides at [REDACTED]
- She works at a small store at the intersection of US 33 / US 119 and State Route 16 in Arnoldsburg, WV.
- On March 4, 2024, she got off work at 5:00 p.m.
- She left the parking lot and was behind Calhoun County Schools Bus #5.
- She described the bus as “swerving badly” as they travelled on Route 16.
- She further stated that in one curve, the bus almost struck the guard rail.
- She noticed the loading door was open; she knew this was not normal because her husband has worked as a substitute bus driver.
- She thought the bus might be having a mechanical issue.
- She stated that over a three-mile stretch, the bus swerved over the line at least three times.
- She thought the bus driver might be ill.
- She considered calling the Calhoun County School Board but knew the office had closed at 5:00 p.m. and did not make that call.
- She thought it was good when the bus turned into the middle/high school because he was off the roads.
- She thought the bus driver was done for the day and did not consider that he might have another run.
- She would have followed him a blocked the bus if she knew the driver had another run.

The interview concluded at 11:10 a.m.