

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration****Research and Development Programs Meeting**

AGENCY: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This notice announces a public meeting at which NHTSA will describe and discuss specific research and development projects. Further, the notice requests suggestions for topics to be presented by the agency.

DATES AND TIMES: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will hold a public meeting devoted primarily to presentations of specific research and development projects on September 14, 2000, beginning at 1:30 p.m. and ending at approximately 5:00 p.m. The deadline for interested parties to suggest agenda topics is 5:00 p.m. on August 31, 2000. Questions may be submitted in advance regarding the agency's research and development projects. They must be submitted in writing by September 5, 2000, to the address given below. If sufficient time is available, questions received after the September 5 date will be answered at the meeting during the discussion period. The individual, group, or company asking a question does not have to be present for the question to be answered. A consolidated list of answers to questions submitted by September 5 will be available at the meeting and will be mailed to requesters after the meeting.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Tysons Westpark Hotel, 8401 Westpark Drive, McLean, Virginia. Suggestions for specific research and development topics as described below and questions for the September 14, 2000, meeting relating to the agency's research and development programs should be submitted to the Office of the

Associate Administrator for Research and Development, NRD-01, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 6206, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590. The fax number is (202) 366-5930.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In recent years, since April 1993, NHTSA has provided detailed information about its research and development programs in presentations at a series of public meetings. The purpose is to make available more complete and timely information regarding the agency's research and development programs. This is the twenty-seventh meeting in that series, and it will be held on September 14, 2000, at the Tysons Westpark Hotel, 8401 Westpark Drive, McLean, Virginia.

NHTSA requests suggestions from interested parties on specific agenda topics to be presented at this meeting. NHTSA will base its decisions about the agenda, in part, on the suggestions it receives by 5:00 p.m. on August 31, 2000. Before the meeting, NHTSA will publish a notice with an agenda listing the research and development topics to be discussed. The agenda can also be obtained by calling or faxing the request to the telephone numbers listed in this notice, through the E-mail address listed in this notice, or from NHTSA's Web site under Announcements/Public Meetings at URL <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/meetings/>.

NHTSA asks that the suggestions be limited to three topics, in priority order, so that the presentations at the September 14, 2000, meeting can be most useful to the audience. Specific research and development topics are listed below. Many of these topics have been discussed at previous meetings. Suggestions for agenda topics are not restricted to this listing, and interested parties are invited to suggest other research and development topics of specific interest to their organizations or items of general interest. Additionally, if

any interested parties would like to make a presentation regarding technical issues concerning any of NHTSA's research programs, information concerning the proposed topic and speaker should be submitted in writing by 5:00 p.m. on August 31, 2000.

Specific R&D topics are:
Fiscal Years 2000-2001 R&D Research Efforts,
International Harmonized Research Activities (IHRA),
On-line tracking system for NHTSA's research projects, and
Crash Injury Research and Engineering Network (CIREN).

Specific Crashworthiness R&D topics are:

Status of advanced air bag research and up-to-date results,
Preparation of new dummies for assessment of advanced air bag technology,
Improved frontal crash protection (program status, problem identification, offset testing),
Vehicle compatibility,
Upgrade side crash protection,
Child restraint/air bag interaction (CRABI) dummy testing,
Head and neck injury research,
Lower extremity injury research, and
Thorax injury research.

Specific Crash Avoidance R&D topics are:

National Advanced Driving Simulator (NADS),
Intelligent vehicle initiative (the rear-end collision avoidance system operational test),
Drowsy driver monitoring,
Driver workload assessment, and
Lane change/merge collision avoidance system guidelines.

Specific National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA) topics are:
NCSA Overview,
Special crash investigation studies, and
Crash avoidance data collection.

Separately, questions regarding research projects that have been submitted in writing not later than 5:00 p.m. on September 5, 2000, will be answered. The summary minutes of the meeting, copies of materials handed out at the meeting, and answers to the questions submitted for response at the meeting will be available for public inspection in the DOT Docket in Washington, DC, within 3 weeks after the meeting. Copies of this material will then be available at ten cents a page upon request to DOT Docket, Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590. The DOT Docket is open to the public from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The summary minutes, handouts, and answers to the questions will also be available on NHTSA's Web site at Announcements/Public Meetings at URL <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/meetings/>.

NHTSA will provide technical aids to participants as necessary, during the Research and Development Programs Meeting. Thus, any person desiring the assistance of "auxiliary aids" (e.g., sign-language interpreter, telecommunication devices for deaf persons (TTDs), readers, taped texts, braille materials, or large print materials and/or a magnifying device), please contact Rita Gibbons by telephone on (202) 366-4862, by telefax on (202) 366-5930, or by E-mail at rgibbons@nhtsa.dot.gov by 5:00 p.m. September 5, 2000.

Should it be necessary to cancel the meeting due to inclement weather or to any other emergencies, a decision to cancel will be made as soon as possible and posted immediately on NHTSA's Web site at Announcements/Public Meetings at URL <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/meetings/>. If you do not have access to the Web site, you may call for information at the contact listed below and leave your telephone or telefax number. You will be called only if the meeting is postponed or canceled.

The next meeting to discuss NHTSA's research and development projects is scheduled for Thursday, December 14, 2000, at the Best Western Gateway International Hotel, Romulus, Michigan.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rita Gibbons, Staff Assistant, Office of

Research and Development, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590. Telephone: (202) 366-4862. Fax number: (202) 366-5930. E-mail: rgibbons@nhtsa.dot.gov.

Issued: August 4, 2000.

Raymond P. Owings,

Associate Administrator for Research and Development.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

[Docket No. NHTSA-2000-6992; Notice 2]

Blue Bird Body Company; Denial of Application for Decision of Inconsequential Noncompliance

Blue Bird Body Company (Blue Bird), 402 N. Camellia Blvd., P.O. Box 937, Fort Valley, Georgia 31030, has determined that 25,839 model TC/2000 Conventional and MiniBird school buses do not meet the 60 percent tensile strength requirements of 49 CFR 571.221, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 221, "School bus body joint strength," and has filed an appropriate report pursuant to 49 CFR Part 573, "Defect and Noncompliance Reports." Blue Bird has also applied to be exempted from the notification and remedy requirements of 49 U.S.C. Chapter 301—"Motor Vehicle Safety" on the basis that the noncompliance is inconsequential to motor vehicle safety.

Notice of receipt of the application was published, with a 30-day comment period, on March 13, 2000 in the **Federal Register** (65 FR 13412). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) received no comments.

FMVSS No. 221, S5, requires that, when tested in accordance with the test procedures of S6, each body panel joint shall be capable of holding the body panel to the member to which it is joined when subjected to a force of 60 percent of the tensile strength of the weakest joined body panel, determined pursuant to S6.2.

Blue Bird has notified NHTSA that the subject school buses were manufactured at its Mount Pleasant, Iowa, plant from November 1, 1993 through December 6, 1999. The noncompliance involves a failure to meet the 60 percent joint strength requirements on certain 8-inch segments of the exterior roof joints. Agency compliance tests, performed by General Testing Laboratories (GTL), determined that the tensile strength of the roof joint tested was 54.9 percent of the required load. Blue Bird stated that a variance in rivet spacing in the vicinity of the roof stringers occurred as some assembly workers at this plant, without authorization, departed from manufacturing procedures of using the pre-punched holes in the roof bows as drill guides to control fastener spacing and, as a result, there are fewer than the six rivets required by Blue Bird in certain 8-inch segments of the roof joints in the affected buses.

Blue Bird supported its application for inconsequential noncompliance with the following statements which have been quoted from its petition:

I. Overall Joint and Body Strength

Blue Bird stated that the purpose of the School Bus Body Joint Strength Standard No. 221 is to reduce deaths and injuries resulting from the structural collapse of school bus bodies during crashes. Blue Bird concluded from the previous rulemakings discussion that the strength of the overall joint and consequently the strength of the overall bus body is the safety objective of Standard 221 and that the measured performance of an eight (8) -inch long joint segment is merely a procedure chosen to evaluate the overall joint in a practical manner.

Blue Bird stated that by that its analysis shows that the overall strengths of the roof joints on the subject test bus not only meet, but comfortably exceed the strength performance requirements of FMVSS 221. Consequently, Blue Bird believes that the noncompliance of several small selected segments of these roof joints is not representative of actual, overall bus body strength performance and is inconsequential as it relates to motor vehicle safety.