

Broken Air Hose Provides Clew To Cause of Clay St. Truck Crash

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was an emergency hand brake, in the cab.

The worn air hose actuated the right rear drive wheel on the tractor, but did not connect with the van.

"However, its failure—if it failed—could have affected the whole brake system," Gaston said.

A number of State and city officials attended the mechanical investigation, held at the fire department's garage at Stockton and Francisco Streets, into the condition of the equipment and safety devices. They have indicated that safety regulations affecting trucks may be strengthened as a result of the tragedy.

On hand were A. W. Petan, general superintendent of all city vehicle shops; Pete Dawson, district director of the ICC; Gaston; Frank Gaddini, inspector of motor vehicles of the police department; Joseph Roberts, of the State division of industrial safety, and Andrew Brozik, safety engineer of the same division; and Robert L. Munson, of the public utilities commission. A number of attorneys for the trucking firm and survivors of the victims also were present.

DAMAGE SUITS.

That there will be damage suits was established by Harold Lipset, private detective, who said he represented the family

of one of the victims, William Ahuna.

Coroner Henry Turkel held the informal hearing earlier, at which De Wolfe was the sole witness.

De Wolfe said he had had twenty years of experience as a truck driver, but added he drove an International truck and was not familiar with that type driven by McCandless. The latter died in the fire-crash, as did six pedestrians.

As to the gear status, De Wolfe admitted on questioning by Turkel the truck could not have reached speeds up to 80 miles or more if in its lowest possible gear.

He said McCandless may have tried to shift to a lower gear—after De Wolfe jumped—and then, failed to get it back into any restraining gear.

He said McCandless' first words when the truck went out of control were:

"My brakes gave out!"

De Wolfe said, "I heard the sound of escaping air.

"I attempted to get the emergency brake, but it was on the other side."

De Wolfe said McCandless pulled the hand lever down for the tractor emergency brakes.

ORDERED TO JUMP.

"Did that seem to respond?" asked Turkel.

"No, sir," the witness replied.

McCandless then ordered De

Wolfe to jump. De Wolfe said he followed on foot, lost sight of the truck, and then saw "a ball of flame and smoke." The truck burned after wrecking ten autos and knocking down the pedestrians as it neared Kearny Street.

De Wolfe didn't know when McCandless' truck last was inspected. He said most drivers inspect their trucks every day.

The Interstate Commerce Commission said in Washington, D. C., that truckers operating in more than one State must insure for a minimum of \$10,000, \$20,000 and \$5,000. The first sum is for the first accident or first victim, the \$20,000 for additional victims, and the \$5,000 for property damage.

An ICC spokesman added that most big trucking firms insure trucks and vans for \$1,000-000 each.

In California, the Public Utilities Commission said that each trucker operating here must insure for \$15,000, \$30,000 and \$10,000 per truck. This is a minimum.

STRICTLY ENFORCED.

The law is strictly enforced, said a PUC spokesman. Since July of 1954, he said, more than 800 truckers have lost their licenses to operate in California because of insurance policy lapses.

The Trucking Association's statement about the "inadequacy" of the ICC Bureau of Motor Carriers came after it was disclosed that the ICC has only two safety inspectors to cover all of California and Nevada.

Wade Sherrard, managing director of the CTA, said:

"We have urged Congress to increase the capabilities of this bureau to function properly."

Victor Barfield, San Francisco insurance attorney, said that financial responsibility in such cases as the one under investigation is "a factual question for the court or a jury to determine."

While Mayflower owned only the van and leased the tractor from McCandless, it has been held the moving van companies are responsible for damages arising from accidents he said. Contract between McCandless and Mayflower could be a determining factor, Barfield said.

"Nine of ten cases hold the lessee responsible," he recalled.

Mayflower was in this case the lessee.