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## Firefighter in fatal fall had stood up in truck, probe finds The Boston Globe

### Police say helmet was not fastened

By Jared Stearns, Globe Correspondent | May 22, 2004

Brookline firefighter Irwin "Buzz" Gross stood up in the rear of a firetruck leaving the station on April 30, and when it turned sharply he fell and suffered injuries that proved fatal, according to a police investigation of the accident.

Gross, 58, was not strapped in by a seat belt, but he was wearing a helmet when his head hit the pavement on Washington Street, outside station No. 7, said Brookline Police Chief Daniel O'Leary. The investigation found, however, that the helmet's chin strap was not fastened.

Gross, a 36-year veteran of the force, fell from the rear-facing driver's side cab as the firetruck headed to a reported gas leak. The rear door had been serviced the week before the accident, the investigation found.

The probe did not find a reason why Gross left his seat, O'Leary said.

"At this time, there is no conclusive evidence on how this accident occurred," he said, reading from a prepared statement.

Nonbinding standards issued by the National Fire Protection Association, based in Quincy, recommend that firefighters have their seat belts fastened while traveling in firetrucks.

O'Leary said in January 2001, the Fire Department apparently hired a company to retrofit the doors on the 1976 Pirsch firetruck Gross was riding. The report, which doesn't mention the January repairs, says the rear left door was serviced on April 22, after firefighters complained.

Gross, of Natick, was taken to Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, where he died on May 3.

Based on statements from other passengers and eyewitnesses, the report indicates that Gross left his seated position "for unknown reasons."

"He was standing facing the front of the firetruck, and turned left while the firetruck was making the right turn onto Washington Street," the report reads. "He was not secured by a safety belt. He fell from the truck through the unlocked rear passenger door.

"This does not mean that the door was latched or locked," the report reads. "If the door was unlatched or unlocked, it is possible that the door would remain in a closed position due to the momentum of the firetruck going forward." ■

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