

# Uniform Guidelines *for* State Highway Safety Programs



March 2009

## Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 17

# Pupil Transportation Safety

Each State, in cooperation with its political subdivisions and tribal governments, should establish a State highway safety program for pupil transportation safety including administration; the identification, operation, and maintenance of buses used for carrying students; and the training of passengers, pedestrians, and bicycle riders. The purpose of this guideline is to provide strategies for minimizing, to the greatest extent possible, the danger of death or injury to school children while they are traveling to and from school and school-related events.

### I. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

There should be a single State agency with primary administrative responsibility for pupil transportation that employs at least one full-time professional to carry out these responsibilities. The responsible State agency should develop an operating system for collecting and reporting information needed to improve the safety of operating school buses and school-chartered buses. Each State should establish procedures to meet the following recommendations for identification and equipment of school buses. All school buses should:

- Be identified with the words "School Bus" printed in letters not less than eight inches high, located between the warning signal lamps as high as possible without impairing visibility of the lettering from both front and rear, and have no other lettering on the front or rear of the vehicle, except as required by Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS), 49 CFR Part 571;
- Be painted National School Bus Glossy Yellow, in accordance with the colorimetric specification of National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Federal Standard No. 595a, Color 13432; except that the hood should be either that color or lusterless black, matching NIST Federal Standard No. 595a, Color 37038.
- Have bumpers of glossy black, matching NIST Federal Standard No. 595a, Color 17038, unless, for increased visibility, they are covered with a reflective material;
- Comply with all FMVSS applicable to school buses at the time of their manufacture;
- Be equipped with safety equipment for use in an emergency, including a charged fire extinguisher that is properly mounted near the driver's seat, with signs indicating the location of such equipment;
- Be equipped with device(s) demonstrated to enhance the safe operation of school vehicles, such as a stop signal arm;

- Be equipped with a system of signal lamps that conforms to the school bus requirements of FMVSS No. 108, 49 CFR 571.108; and
- Have a system of mirrors that conforms to the school bus requirements of FMVSS No. 111, 49 CFR 571.111.
- School-chartered buses should comply with all applicable Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR) and FMVSS.

Any school bus meeting the recommendations above that is permanently converted for uses other than transporting children to and from school should be painted a color other than National School Bus Glossy Yellow, and should have the stop arms and school bus signal lamps removed.

School buses, while being operated on a public highway and transporting primarily passengers other than school children, should have the words "School Bus" covered, removed, or otherwise concealed, and the stop arm and signal lamps should not be operated.

## II. OPERATIONS

Each State should establish procedures to meet the following recommendations for operating school buses and school-chartered buses:

- Personnel
  - Each State should develop a plan for selecting, training, and supervising people whose primary duties involve transporting school children in order to ensure that such persons will attain a high degree of competence in, and knowledge of, their duties;
  - Every person who drives a school bus or school-chartered bus occupied by school children should, at a minimum:
    - Have a valid State driver's license to operate such a vehicle. All drivers who operate a vehicle designed to transport 16 or more persons (including the driver) are required by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) Commercial Driver's License Standards (49 CFR Part 383) to have a valid commercial driver's license;
    - Meet all physical, mental, moral, and other requirements established by the State agency having primary responsibility for pupil transportation, including requirements related to drug and/or alcohol misuse or abuse; and
    - Meet the physical qualification standards for drivers under the FMCSR of the FMCSA, 49 CFR Part 391.
- Vehicles
  - Each State should enact legislation that provides for uniform procedures regarding school buses stopping on public highways for loading and discharge of children. Public information campaigns should be conducted on a regular basis to ensure that the driving public fully understands the implications of school bus warning signals and requirements to stop for school buses that are loading or discharging school children. Schools should work with local law enforcement agencies to enforce laws against passing a stopped school bus that is loading or unloading students.

- Each State should establish policies to ensure that school districts are aware of the Federal statutory provision 49 U.S.C. Section 30112(a), as amended by Section 10309(b) of SAFETEA-LU (P.L. 109-59), prohibiting the purchase by schools and school systems of new non-conforming vehicles for school transportation purposes, and prohibit operation of any school bus or other vehicle used for school transportation purposes unless it meets the FMVSSs for school buses.
- Each State should minimize highway use hazards to school bus and school-chartered bus occupants, other highway users, pedestrians, bicycle riders and property. Efforts to minimize such hazards should include, but not be limited to:
  - Planning safe routes and annually reviewing routes for safety hazards;
  - Planning routes to ensure the most effective use of school buses and school-chartered buses to ensure that passengers are not standing while these vehicles are in operation;
  - Providing loading and unloading zones off the main traveled part of highways, whenever it is practical to do so;
  - Establishing restricted loading and unloading areas for school buses and school-chartered buses at or near schools;
  - Ensuring that school bus operators, when stopping on a highway to take on or discharge children, adhere to State regulations for loading and discharging including the use of signal lamps;
  - Replacing school buses manufactured before April 1, 1977, with buses that meet the current FMVSSs for school buses, and not chartering any pre-1977 school buses; and
  - Prohibiting public or private schools from purchasing school buses built prior to April 1, 1977 for school transportation or school-related events.
- Use of amber signal lamps to indicate that a school bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children is at the option of the State. Use of red warning signal lamps as specified in this guideline for any purpose or at any time other than when the school bus is stopped to load or discharge passengers should be prohibited.
- When school buses are equipped with stop arms, such devices should be operated only in conjunction with red warning signal lamps, when vehicles are stopped.
- Seating
  - Children are protected in large school buses by compartmentalization, a passive occupant protection system. This provides a protective envelope consisting of strong, closely-spaced seats that have energy-absorbing padded seat backs that help to distribute and reduce crash forces. Compartmentalization is most effective when occupants are fully seated within the bus seat. Seating should be provided that will allow each occupant to sit on a school bus seat without any part of his or her body extending into the aisle.
  - There should be no auxiliary seating accommodations such as temporary or folding jump seats in school buses.
  - Standing while school buses and school-chartered buses are in motion should not be permitted. Routing and seating plans should be coordinated to eliminate passengers standing when a school bus or school-chartered bus is in motion.

- Drivers of school buses and school-chartered buses should be required to wear occupant restraints whenever the vehicle is in motion.
- Passengers in school buses and school-chartered buses with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 10,000 pounds or less should be required to wear occupant restraints (where provided) whenever the vehicle is in motion. Occupant restraints should comply with the requirements of FMVSS Nos. 208, 209 and 210, as they apply to multipurpose vehicles.
- When transporting preschool age children in a school bus;
  - Each child should be properly secured in a Child Safety Restraint System, suitable for the child's weight and age, that meets applicable FMVSSs; and
  - The Child Safety Restraint System should be properly secured to the school bus seat, using anchorages that meet FMVSSs.
  - Emergency exit access
- Baggage and other items transported in the passenger compartment should be stored and secured so that the aisles are kept clear and the door(s) and emergency exit(s) remain unobstructed at all times.
- When school buses are equipped with interior luggage racks, the racks should be capable of retaining their contents in a crash or sudden driving maneuver.
- **Vehicle maintenance.** Each State should establish procedures to meet the following recommendations for maintaining buses used to carry school children:
  - School buses should be maintained in safe operating condition through a systematic preventive maintenance program;
  - Regularly scheduled vehicle inspections should be conducted as specified in accordance with FMCSA regulations contained in 49 CFR Part 396.3; and
  - School bus drivers should perform daily inspections of their vehicles, including all safety equipment and submit a report of their findings daily as specified in 49 CFR 396.11.

### **III. OTHER ELEMENTS OF PUPIL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY**

- At least once during each school semester, each pupil transported from home to school in a school bus should be instructed in safe riding practices, proper loading and unloading techniques, proper street crossing to and from school bus stops and should participate in supervised and timed emergency evacuation drills. Prior to each departure, each pupil transported on an activity or field trip in a school bus or school-chartered bus should be instructed in safe riding practices and the location and operation of emergency exits.
- Parents and school officials should work together to identify and select safe pedestrian and bicycle routes for the use of school children. (See Guideline No. 14.)
- All school children should be instructed in safe transportation practices for walking to and from school. For those children who routinely walk to school, training should include preselected routes and the importance of adhering to those routes.
- Children riding bicycles to and from school should receive bicycle safety education, be required to wear bicycle safety helmets, and not deviate from preselected routes.

- Local school officials and law enforcement personnel should work together to establish crossing guard programs.
- Local school officials should investigate programs that incorporate the practice of escorting students across streets and highways when they leave school buses. These programs may include the use of school safety patrols or adult monitors.
- Local school officials should establish passenger vehicle loading and unloading points at schools that are separate from the school bus loading zones.
- Before chartering any vehicle or motor coach for school activity purposes, schools should check the safety record of charter bus companies through the FMCSA Safety and Fitness Electronic Records System. Schools should also consider using a multi-function school activity bus in place of charter buses where feasible. A multi-function school activity bus is not required to be equipped with traffic control devices (i.e., flashing lights and stop arm). These buses are not intended for the roadside picking up and dropping off of children during service between home and school. They are intended for use by schools and other institutions that need transportation services for school activity trips or for other coordinated transportation activities.

#### **IV. PROGRAM EVALUATION**

The pupil transportation safety program should be evaluated at least annually by the State agency having primary administrative responsibility for pupil transportation.

#### **V. DEFINITIONS**

- A “bus” is a motor vehicle designed for carrying more than 10 persons (including the driver).
- A “school bus” is a “bus” that is used for purposes that include carrying students to and from school or related events on a regular basis, but does not include a transit bus or a school-chartered bus.
- A “school-chartered bus” is a bus that is operated under a short-term contract with State or school authorities who have acquired the exclusive use of the vehicle at a fixed charge to provide transportation for a group of students to a special school-related event.
- A “multi-function school activity bus” is a school bus whose purposes do not include transporting student to and from home or school bus stops.
- “Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR)” are the regulations of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) for commercial motor vehicles in interstate commerce, including buses with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or gross vehicle weight greater than 10,000 pounds; designed or used to transport more than 8 passengers (including the driver) for compensation; or designed or used to transport more than 15 passengers (including the driver), and not used to transport passengers for compensation. (The FMCSR are set forth in 49 CFR Parts 390 – 399.)
- A “child safety restraint system” is any device (except a passenger system lap seat belt or lap/shoulder seat belt), designed for use in a motor vehicle to restrain, seat, or position a child who weighs less than 65 pounds.