



Fort Belvoir Directorate of Emergency Services

Fire and Emergency Services Division

6100 Abbot Road

Fort Belvoir, VA 22060

Office: (703) 805-2091 Non-Emergency Dispatch (703) 806-6911



HANDS ON THE WHEEL & EYES ON THE ROAD

Fort Belvoir, VA—September 3, 2015- With the start of a new school year fast approaching, the Directorate of Emergency Services-Fire & Emergency Services Division reminds all drivers, students and parents to put safety first in school zones and near bus stops. In this region, students travel to school by a variety of means: school bus (the safest means of transportation to and from school), walking, bikes, public transportation, or in vehicles with family or friends. It is everyone's responsibility to use caution and stay focused and alert around traffic to ensure children can travel to and from school safely.

According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data, from 2004 to 2013, there were 327 school-age children who died in school-transportation-related crashes; 54 were occupants of school transportation vehicles, 147 were occupants of other vehicles, 116 were pedestrians, and 9 were pedal cyclists.

Please take time to review the traffic tips with everyone in the family:

For Drivers

- Be alert and slow down. Eliminate any distractions inside your car so you can concentrate on the road and your surroundings. Put down your phone and never text while driving. Looking away from the roadway for just two seconds doubles the chance of being involved in a crash.
- Passengers should wear a seat belt and/or ride in an age and size-appropriate car safety seat or booster seat. Children of all ages are safest when properly restrained in the backseat of a vehicle.
- Exercise extra caution as you head out to work and be on the lookout for school buses. Many bus routes or schedules change each year and you may encounter a school bus or stop where you may have never seen one before.
- Scan between parked cars. Nearly 40 percent of child pedestrian fatalities occurred between the hours of 4 p.m. and 8 p.m., mostly at non-intersection locations, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Children can quickly dart out between parked cars or other objects along the roadway. Motorists should pay close attention not only at intersections, but along any residential roadways where children could be present.
- Take extra time when making a right turn on a red light and be on the lookout for pedestrians.
- School Zones: Slow down and be especially alert in residential neighborhoods and around schools. Be alert to children as you back your vehicle out of your driveway or exit your garage.
- Expect delays near schools, plan ahead and allow extra time to reach your destination.
- Safety on the road is especially important for “new” drivers that may be driving to school for the first time.



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Reminders for Parents and Children

- Be realistic about your child's pedestrian skills. Children are not always aware of their surroundings and may dart into traffic assuming drivers will see and stop for them. Carefully consider whether your child is ready to walk to school or wait for the bus without adult supervision and walk the route with your child beforehand.
- Teach children to always cross the street at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks and look left, right and left again before crossing. Children may have difficulty gauging the distance and speed of an approaching car, and may not recognize and react to potentially hazardous situations.
- If traveling to school by bike, obey the rules of the road and wear a helmet. Not only is it the smart thing to do, it is also the law in Virginia and Maryland.
- Be sure that your child knows his or her phone number and address, your work number and when to call 911 for emergencies.
- Only drive or park in authorized areas when picking up or dropping off students at school.
- Be a good neighbor. Respect private property and always be on your best behavior while waiting for the bus.

School Bus Safety – What Motorists Should Know

All motorists are required by law to stop when the red lights on buses are flashing. Passing a school bus when the red lights are flashing is not only illegal it is also one of the biggest threats to student safety. Motorists should be aware that the red flashing lights and the stop sign may be engaged shortly after the amber lights are on. Vehicles traveling in the same direction as the bus are always required to stop. In Virginia and Maryland, the law states that vehicles must come to a complete stop on both sides of the roadway if there is no physical divider or barrier. Violations can result in a citation and fine.

Home Alone—Parents need to carefully consider the pros and cons of having a child stay home alone before/after school. Be familiar with laws and child protective policies in your jurisdiction and, because children mature at different rates, your decision should not be based on age alone. Children should master important safety skills before staying home alone. Be sure to make and practice a home fire escape plan that includes a designated “safe” area outside where everyone will meet if the smoke alarm sounds and ensure they know when and how to call 703-781-1800 on Fort Belvoir (9-1-1 off the installation) in an emergency. Unattended cooking continues to be the leading cause of home fires in the United States and firefighters strongly recommend having after school snacks on hand that do not require cooking. Children should only use kitchen appliances while under close adult supervision.

Let's have a great start to the school year--Please slow down and watch for kids!