

HIGHWAY SAFETY PROGRAM
GUIDELINE No. 17
PUPIL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

- I. Scope. This guideline establishes minimum recommendations for a State highway safety program for pupil transportation safety including the identification, operation, and maintenance of buses used for carrying students: training of passengers, pedestrians, and bicycle riders; and administration.
- II. Purpose. The purpose of this guideline is to minimize, 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.
- III. Definition.

Bus

A motor vehicle designed for carrying more than 10 persons (including the driver).

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR)

The regulations of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for commercial motor vehicles in interstate commerce, including buses with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) greater than 10,000 pounds or designed to carry 16 or more persons (including the driver), other than buses used to transport school children from home to school and from school to home. (The FMCSR are set forth in 49 CFR parts 383-399.)

School-chartered bus

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.

School bus

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.

- IV. Pupil Transportation Safety Program Administration and Operations.--
Recommendation. Each State, in cooperation with its school districts and other political subdivisions, should have a comprehensive pupil transportation safety program to ensure that school buses and school-chartered buses are operated and maintained so as to achieve the highest possible level of safety.
 - A. Administration.
 - 1. There should be a single State agency having primary administrative responsibility for pupil transportation, and employing at least one full-time professional to carry out these responsibilities.
 - 2. 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. This

includes the collection and evaluation of uniform crash data consistent with the criteria set forth in Highway Safety Program Guidelines No. 10, "Traffic Records" and No. 18, "Accident Investigation and Reporting. "

- B. Identification and equipment of school buses. Each State should establish procedures to meet the following recommendations for identification and equipment of school buses.
1. All school buses should:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Have bumpers of glossy black, matching NIST Federal Standard No. 595a, Color 17038, unless, for increased visibility, they are covered with a reflective material.
 - d. 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.
 - e. Be equipped with device(s) demonstrated to enhance the safe operation of school vehicles, such as a stop signal arm.
 - f. Be equipped with a system of signal lamps that conforms to the school bus requirements of FMVSS No. 108, 49 CFR 571.108.
 - g. Have a system of mirrors that conforms to the school bus requirements of FMVSS No. 111, 49 CFR 571.111.
 - h. Comply with all FMVSS applicable to school buses at the time of their manufacture.
 2. Any school bus meeting the identification recommendations of sections 1, a-h above that is permanently converted for use wholly for purposes other than transporting children to and from school or school-related events should be painted a color other than National School Bus Glossy Yellow, and should have the stop arms and school bus signal lamps described by sections 1, e & f removed.
 3. 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 described by sections 1, e & f should not be operated.

4. School-chartered buses should comply with all applicable FMCSR and FMVSS.

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

1. Personnel.

- a. Each State should develop a plan for selecting, training, and supervising persons 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.
- b. Every person who drives a school bus or school-chartered bus occupied by school children should, as a minimum:
 1. Have a valid State driver's license to operate such a vehicle. All drivers who operate a vehicle designed to carry 16 or more persons (including the driver) are required by FHWA's Commercial Driver's License Standards by April 1, 1992 (49 CFR part 383) to have a valid commercial driver's license;
 2. Meet all physical, mental, moral and other requirements established by the State agency having primary responsibility for pupil transportation, including requirements for drug and/or alcohol misuse or abuse; and
 3. Be qualified as a driver under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations of the FHWA. 49 CFR part 391. if the driver or the driver's employer is subject to those regulations.

2. Vehicles.

- a. 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.
- b. Each State should develop plans for minimizing highway use hazards to school bus and school-chartered bus occupants, other highway users, pedestrians, bicycle riders and property. They should include, but not be limited to:
 1. Careful planning and annual review of routes for safety hazards;
 2. Planning routes to ensure maximum use of school buses and school chartered buses, and to ensure that

passengers are not standing while these vehicles are in operation;

3. Providing loading and unloading zones off the main traveled part, of highways, whenever it is practical to do so;
 4. Establishing restricted loading and unloading areas for school buses and school-chartered buses at or near schools;
 5. 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 as specified in section B.1.f. of this guideline;
 6. Prohibiting, by legislation or regulation, operation of any school bus unless it meets the equipment and identification recommendations of this guideline; and
 7. Replacing, consistent with the economic realities which typically face school districts, those school buses which are not manufactured to meet the April 1, 1977 FMVSS for school buses, with those manufactured to meet the stricter school bus standards, and not chartering any pre-1977 school buses.
 8. Informing potential buyers of pre 1977 school buses that these buses may not meet current standards for newly manufactured buses and of the need for continued maintenance of these buses and adequate safety instruction.
- c. 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 section B, 1, f, of 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.
- d. 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.
- e. Seating.
1. Standing while school buses and school-chartered buses are in motion should not be permitted. Routing and seating plans should be coordinated so as to eliminate passengers standing when a school bus or school chartered bus is in motion.
 2. Seating should be provided that will permit each occupant to sit in a seat intended by the vehicle's

manufacturer to provide accommodation for a person at least as large as a 5th percentile adult female, as defined in 49 CFR 571.208. Due to the variation in sizes of children of different ages, States and school districts should exercise judgment in deciding how many students are actually transported in a school bus or school-chartered bus.

3. There should be no auxiliary seating accommodations such as temporary or folding jump seats in school buses.
4. Drivers of school buses and school-chartered buses should be required to wear occupant restraints whenever the vehicle is in motion.
5. 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.

- f. 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.

D. Vehicle maintenance. Each State should establish procedures to meet the following recommendations for maintaining buses used to carry school children:

1. School buses should be maintained in safe operating condition through a systematic preventive maintenance program.
2. All school buses should be inspected at least semiannually. In addition, school buses and school-chartered buses subject to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations of FHWA should be inspected and maintained in accordance with those regulations (49 CFR Parts 393 and 396).
3. School bus drivers should be required to perform daily pre-trip inspections of their vehicles, and the safety equipment thereon (especially fire extinguishers), and to report promptly and in writing any problems discovered that may affect the safety of the vehicle's operation or result in its mechanical breakdown. Pre-trip inspection and condition reports for school buses and school-chartered buses subject to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety

Regulations of FHWA should be performed in accordance with those regulations (49 CFR 392.7, 392.8, and 396).

E. Other Aspects of Pupil Transportation Safety.

1. 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 emergency evacuation drills, which are timed. 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 on the location and operation of emergency exits.
2. Parents and school officials should work together to select and designate the safest pedestrian and bicycle routes for the use of school children.
3. 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.
4. Children riding bicycles to and from school should receive bicycle safety education, wear bicycle safety helmets, and not deviate from preselected routes.
5. Local school officials and law enforcement personnel should work together to establish crossing guard programs.
6. Local school officials should investigate programs which 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.
7. Local school officials should establish passenger vehicle loading and unloading points at schools that are separate from the school bus loading zones.

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