

MSU-ES Dawg Tracks



August, 2008

Roadway Safety for Back to School



I read the following letter in a Worker's Compensation Administrator's newsletter and thought it was worth summarizing and including here.

Observing drivers in the morning, it appears that some aren't conscious of the rules regarding school bus safety. The letter also gave some statistics and facts on injuries and sometimes death for students waiting on the bus for school.

This article originated from the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC). Due to lack of space, we shall summarize the outstanding facts and concerns.

GMAC did a study and found out that **94 million American drivers** are not clear on school bus roadway safety rules. The study polled 5,175 licensed American drivers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Some of the study results show that 93% of the drivers could correctly identify that when approaching a stopped school bus with flashing red lights, they are supposed to stop. However, 47% underestimated the recommended distance a car should stop (rule of thumb is at least 20 feet or 1 ½ car lengths).

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA), over the next few weeks **25 million students** will be heading back to school, with an average of **500,000 buses** on the road. Statistically, this is one of the safest modes of transportation, but when an accident does happen, it most often involves pedestrian passengers as they are loading and unloading from the bus. The NHTSA research depicts that more than twice as many children are killed in school bus accidents while getting on or off the bus than while riding it.

Sheena Poe, Chief Claims Officer for GMAC, who oversees thousands of accident reports each year, thinks that parents need to recognize children's traffic habits. She stated that young children are more likely to get hit because they:

- Hurry to the bus.
- Act before thinking, as they have limited experience with traffic.
- Assume motorists will wait for them to cross.
- Move out of the bus driver's line of sight.
- Drop something and run into the path of vehicles to pick it up.

Gary Kusumi, CEO & President of GMAC, states that. "The consequences of these dangerous behaviors are too great to ignore. As drivers, it's up to us to pay attention and exert extra caution as kids head back to school; and we should be teaching kids to do their part for roadway safety."

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Excerpts: GMAC Administrator letter / NHTSA

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10 TIPS TO KEEP THE ROADWAYS SAFE DURING BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIMES:

DRIVERS –

- **Stay stopped.** When a school bus stops and displays its red flashing lights, come to a stop until the lights are no longer flashing or until signaled to proceed by the bus driver or police officer.
- **Don't Pass.** It is illegal to pass on the right side of the bus, where children are loading or unloading. In some states, school bus drivers can report violators.
- **Be attentive.** Children may run out into the streets heading home or to the playground without realizing that there are drivers nearby.
- **Go slow.** Obey the posted speed limits in school zones where children are often walking or playing and pay attention to crossing guards.
- **Keep back.** The recommended distance following a school bus is at least 20 feet (or at least 1 ½ car lengths.)

FOR PARENTS & CHILDREN –

- **See and be seen.** Children should stay at least 10 feet away from the bus and never walk behind it. They should take five giant steps in front of the bus before crossing to ensure the driver can see them.
- **Stay on the sidewalk.** Make sure that the children stay somewhere safe like the sidewalk or in the driveway and out of the street while waiting for the bus.
- **Look before you leap.** Teach your child how to cross the street safely. Practice left-right-left and make sure to check for turning vehicles.
- **Get an early start.** As a general rule, children under 10 should always be supervised when crossing the street. Though children are typically unfit to handle tricky traffic scenarios until this age, you can help prepare your children by practicing safe traffic habits at a younger age.
- **Practice what you preach.** Children learn by example, so the best way to teach them safe traffic habits is to follow them yourself.

We study and work at getting new material to write about, but some subjects that occur repetitively need to be brought up more often. I believe school safety, like holiday safety should be a constant reminder to us and the dangers that can derive from incognizance of this subject.

**SAFETY IS AS SIMPLE AS
A-B-C
ALWAYS BE CAREFUL!**