

# School Bus Safety Talking Points

9-6-09

Canyon Courier Back To School Education Section

By Jackie Mohr

## Statistics

School buses are the safest form of highway transportation.

There are about 440,000 public school buses that travel approximately 5 billion miles each year. Each day school buses carry around 20 million students to school and school-related events. (Accident Facts 1996, National Safety Council)

In 1996, 10 school bus occupants were killed in crashes (2 drivers, 8 passengers).

In 1996, 23 pedestrians were killed in school bus-related crashes.

About two-thirds of school bus-related fatalities happen outside the bus.

For the past 11 years, an average of 35 school-age children died in school bus-related traffic crashes each year (9 school bus occupants and 26 pedestrians).

Recent studies in Florida and Illinois found almost 10,000 incidents (per day per state) of motorists illegally passing stopped school buses that were loading or unloading children. In Florida, 4.4 percent of the vehicles passed the school bus on the door side of the bus.

**Why No Safety Belts?** On school buses, occupant protection is provided by "compartmentalization," not safety belts. Compartmentalization is the name for the protective envelope created by strong, closely spaced seats that have energy-absorbing high seat backs that protect occupants in the event of a crash.

School buses also have other features that contribute to the high level of safety they provide each occupant. Features such as emergency exits, roof structure, fuel systems, and body joint strength make the bus stronger, larger, heavier, and safer than most other vehicles on the road today.

## Rules of School Bus Safety

### or students:

Be at the bus stop at least 5 minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive.

When the bus approaches, stand at least 3 giant steps (6 feet) away from the edge of the road, and line up away from the street.

Wait until the bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says that it is okay before stepping on the bus.

When crossing the street in front of the bus, walk on the sidewalk or side of the road at least 5 giant steps (10 feet) ahead of the bus before you cross. Be sure the bus driver can see you, and you can see the driver.

When exiting the bus, be careful that clothing with drawstrings and book bags with straps do not get caught in the handrail or door.

Never walk behind the bus.

Walk at least three giant steps away from the side of the bus any time you are walking beside the bus.

- If you drop something near or under the bus, tell the bus driver. Never try to pick it up. The driver may not see you and begin to drive away.

**For motorists:**

- When driving in neighborhoods with school zones, watch for children traveling to school. They are unpredictable in their actions, and it is your responsibility to anticipate and prepare to react to what they may do.
- Drive slowly. Watch for children walking in the street, especially if there are no sidewalks in the neighborhood.
- Watch for children playing and gathering near school bus stops.
- Be alert. Children arriving late for the bus may dart into the street without looking for traffic.
- Learn and obey the school bus laws in your state.

Learn the flashing light system that school bus drivers use to alert motorists about stopping:

Yellow flashing lights mean the bus is preparing to stop and load or unload children. Motorists need to slow down and prepare to stop.

- Red flashing lights and extended stop arm mean the bus has stopped and children are boarding or exiting the bus. Motorists must come to a complete stop a safe distance from the bus and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the arm is retracted, and the bus begins moving before they start driving again.

For more information about school bus safety, please contact Drive Smart Evergreen/Conifer Executive Director, Jackie Mohr at 303-674-9683, [staff@drivesmarte-c.org](mailto:staff@drivesmarte-c.org), or [www.drivesmarte-c.org](http://www.drivesmarte-c.org).

*Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*