

October 17, 2005

School bus safety is all about protecting Alberta's children

Edmonton... For a quarter of a million Alberta students, the day starts and ends with a ride on a school bus. Most trips are routine and students arrive at their destination without incident. Transport Canada studies show school bus travel is the safest mode of transportation to and from schools - 16 times safer than the family car. Maintaining this level of safety takes effort on the part of everyone.

Drive defensively near a school bus

Motorists must use extra caution around buses and in school zones. They must always be prepared for a bus to stop and for children to get on and off the bus. Motorists need to respect the flashing lights on a school bus, which create a safety zone for children around the vehicle and are often the children's only defence when they get on or off the bus.

When approaching a school bus, please remember these important rules:

- Watch out for alternating flashing amber lights, which means a school bus is slowing to stop where students will either be getting on or off the bus.
- Slow down and stop when the school bus activates its alternately flashing red lights. This means you must stop whether you are approaching an oncoming bus or following one. The only time you can proceed is if you are on the opposite side of a highway that is divided by a median.
- Proceed only when the flashing red lights on the bus have stopped.
- Watch for school buses loading and unloading children, even if the lights aren't flashing.
- Always watch for children crossing the road.
- The fine for passing a school bus with its red lights flashing is **\$402 and six demerit points**.

When travelling in school zones, motorists must pay attention to the posted signs. School zones have a speed limit of 30 km/h, unless otherwise posted, in both urban and rural areas. These limits are in effect on school days, from 8:00 am to 9:30 am; 11:30 am to 1:30 pm and 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm.

Safety rules for children

For the safety of our children, it is important for parents, teachers and caregivers to teach children school bus safety rules. Some important rules for children:

- Never run to or from the bus.
- Wait at the designated stop away from the road.
- Approach the bus only when the bus driver says it's safe to board.
- Remember the "danger zone" - if you can touch the bus you are too close. The blind spots around a bus are where children are most at risk. Bus drivers have a limited field of vision and often can't see children hidden in the danger zone. It's up to children to know where the safe areas are around buses and to stay there until they board.
- Use the handrail when getting on or off the bus.

- Do not stop to pick something up if it drops near the bus. Tell the driver or an adult.
- Take a seat right away, stay seated and talk quietly. School bus drivers have an important responsibility and should not be distracted while driving.

Also parents should ensure their children know the *point, pause and proceed* pedestrian crossing system. This trusted method of looking in all directions before crossing the street increases children's safety: scan for danger left, right, ahead and behind when crossing a road, then point across the road with your hand and arm and proceed when safe. Keep checking for traffic as you cross.

Did you know...?

- Daily school bus routes throughout the province total more than 400,000 kilometres - almost 10 times around the earth.
- In Alberta, school buses must undergo a "bumper-to-bumper" safety inspection every six months. This includes reviewing the bus exterior, body, doors and seat conditions, fuel systems, brakes, fire extinguishers and contents of first aid kits.
- School bus drivers must inform the carrier responsible for the vehicle if they detect any defect or deficiency that would affect the safe operation of the vehicle. Drivers must also check to ensure appropriate repairs are made.
- Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation's transport officers and other enforcement agencies carry out random roadside inspections to ensure regular school bus safety inspections and maintenance plans are effective.

For information about traffic safety, please contact the Traffic Safety Initiative at (780) 422-8839 or visit www.saferoads.com.

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Media enquiries may be directed to:

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