

The Do's and Don'ts of Cell Phone Use for School Bus Drivers

Reference Guide and Test

Video Communications

Introduction

School bus drivers using cell phones on the school bus have become a hot topic lately. There have been serious consequences that have stemmed from cell phone use while driving a bus. Many states, as well as school districts, have severely limited the use of cell phones when operating a school bus. In the short video, we give the do's and the don'ts of cell phone use on the school bus. We will show the dangers of using cell phones while transporting students, but also give reasons why a cell phone may be an important tool to have on the bus.

Distractions:

1) School buses are designed for safety. In fact, riding a school bus is the safest way for children to get to and from school. But there have been instances when a school bus driver places their student passengers at risk by making careless safety errors, such as texting or talking on the cell phone while driving. Driving a bus full of students can be demanding as it is.

2) According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Board, drivers who use cell phones are **four times** as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves and/or the passengers they carry. Distraction from cell phone use while driving, is equal to having the same alcohol rate that would result in a DUI. Reaction time isn't any faster whether your hands are free or you are holding the cell phone.

3) Examples of why school bus drivers should not use a cell phone or text while driving can include, but is not limited to, the following types of distractions:

a) Visual Distractions - This causes the driver to look away from the road while driving. An example of this would be if a **driver receives a call** on their cell phone, the driver will have to take their eyes off the road to grab the phone and receive the call. This is a major distraction.

When a **driver texts**, they are continually forced to look down. The driver's visual orientation is altered. Not only is the driver taking their eyes off the road, but they are now out of position to use their mirrors to see traffic in the immediate vicinity of the bus.

b) Auditory Distractions - This can occur when someone may be startled due to sudden sounds. In the video, we show a student who makes a poor decision by lighting a firecracker on the bus. It causes an auditory distraction for the bus driver. The loud sound of the fire cracker exploding causes the human brain to react.

Likewise, if a driver reacts to the ring of a cell phone, they will be distracted resulting in a loss of concentration while driving the bus.

c) Cognitive Distractions - These types of distractions are caused by a driver who is either lost in thought or possibly engrossed in a conversation on a cell phone. Here is an example of how it can occur. In the video, a bus driver receives a call. It is from a family friend asking if they can pick up their child after school. It is evident that the driver is distracted. She is more focused on the conversation with her friend than driving the bus. This causes complacency and a lack of focus.

If you are engaged in a conversation, you are not likely to be aware of what is happening among the students on the bus.

4) Even the ringing of a phone can cause a distraction. Be smart and focus on driving your bus. The bottom line is: using a cell phone while driving a school bus should be avoided at all costs. As a school bus driver you are taught to remain focused and to not become complacent. By using a cell phone when driving, you are not fulfilling your obligation to use every means necessary to safely transport students.

The Importance of Carrying a Cell Phone:

1) Many districts and states have made exceptions when it's safe and advisable for bus drivers to use mobile communication, when performing their basic job duties. Several areas of the country do not have two way radio coverage available. For many bus drivers, cell phones are a new means for communication to contact dispatch and alert them of important bus related issues. Some school districts actually require their drivers to use cell phones because of limited or no two way radio coverage.

2) Carrying a cell phone has its advantages for the following reasons:

- a) Sometimes the 2 way radio simply fails. If this occurs, a cell phone would enable a driver to get in touch with dispatch, be informed of hazards, stay updated on the weather, or be informed on special pickup instructions.

- b) When a bus with students on board stalls on a set of railroad tracks. After issuing an immediate evacuation of the bus, you can use your cell phone to contact emergency personnel or dispatch.

- c) When a school bus is involved in an accident. With a cell phone on the bus, a driver can immediately get connected to 911 and provide emergency personnel with pertinent information that will assist 911 to expedite their response.

The Correct Procedures for Using a Cell Phone on the Bus:

1) Should you be in a position where you need to use your cell phone, here are a couple of techniques that should be applied:

a) When carrying a cell phone on the school bus, it is a good idea to have the ringer on low. You don't want the ring to cause an auditory distraction. In addition, by keeping the ringer at a low level, you will be reducing the chances of being startled by it.

b) Be sure to let family and friends know not to call you while you are driving.

c) The procedures to take when it's absolutely necessary to use a cell phone are to: Safely pull the bus over to the side of the road. Secure the bus, then use the cell phone.

2) In the video, we introduce a major issue. It is when a driver observes another school bus driver using a cell phone while driving. It is your job to report any unsafe driving by another bus driver. This does not mean you are snitching on your co worker. It means that you care enough about student safety to make it your business to do something about it. Anytime you see another bus driver on the phone while driving, be sure to bring it up to your supervisor. If you don't, students, parents or bystanders could call it in and this would reflect negatively on all bus drivers, not just the one breaking the rules.

During the video, we have shown several different ways cell phone use can be a major distraction for school bus drivers. We have also shown the value of carrying a cell phone and the practical situations for it's use.

Just remember, school bus drivers should not talk or text on a cell phone while driving the bus!

Using cell phones while driving degrades driver performance, decreases reaction time and increases instances of attention lapses. It is your responsibility to stay focused and mindful of the student passengers that you are transporting. Talk with your supervisor and ask questions about your state laws and district policies. Be sure you follow and obey them.

Test Questions

1) Distractions do not occur when using a hands free device.

TRUE or FALSE

2) Distraction from cell phone use while driving, is equal to having the same alcohol rate that would result in a DUI.

TRUE or FALSE

3) A _____ distraction can occur when someone is engaged in conversation while driving.

- a) Visual
- b) Auditory
- c) Cognitive
- d) None of the above

4) It may be necessary to carry a cell phone with you on the bus because:

- a) There is limited or no two way radio coverage.
- b) Emergency Evacuations may need to be issued.
- c) A school bus is involved in an accident.
- d) You may need directions.
- e) None of the above
- f) All of the Above

5) It is your job to report any unsafe driving by another bus driver.

TRUE or FALSE

Answer Key

1) FALSE

2) TRUE

3) C

4) F

5) TRUE