

# **Everyday Hazards for School Bus Drivers**

Reference Guide and Test

## **Introduction**

One of the most important and often overlooked issues for school bus drivers is hazards. During the course of the video, we demonstrate how to recognize, avoid and develop awareness for the hazards that drivers face while transporting students. We put the viewer in the drivers seat and also cover some of the other important issues that drivers are faced with on a daily basis. Our purpose for the video, is to show drivers the importance of staying aware of their surroundings, making sure to scan the roadway for potential hazards and the ability to follow safe driving procedures when faced with these kinds of hazards. Be sure to follow the policies and procedures of your school district. If you are unsure of any of these policies, go to your supervisor and get an explanation.

## **SCANNING ROADWAYS**

1) Whenever you are operating the school bus, you want to keep this key concept in mind; you should always scan the roadway ahead of you. You should scan ahead and search for potential conflicts or hazardous conditions. You can use systematic search patterns and eye scanning habits to quickly identify hazards. You should be able to **recognize ANY potential hazards, choose the defense that you want to apply, and of course, act in time.**

2) Every hazard faced is a potential problem. ***Most good drivers look 12 to 15 seconds ahead.***

- a) At lower speeds, that's about one block.
- b) At highway speeds it's about a quarter of a mile.

3) Keep in mind this important safety tip. When you are looking 12 to 15 ahead of you, don't forget to stay aware of objects that are closer to you.

4) You should also train yourself not to stare too long at a particular object, as this limits your clues from a larger field of vision. And keep in mind that the more your speed increases, the farther ahead you should focus.

5) In the video, we approach a busy downtown area to make about the importance of scanning the area. We show a vehicle in the roadway with a woman standing next to it. We also show pedestrians who are waiting to cross the street. If the roadway was not properly scanned, the pedestrians would not have been identified. Pedestrians And remember, pedestrians usually have the right of way..

## **SIGNS AND ROAD MARKINGS**

6) Signs and road markings appear along every type of roadway. Traffic signs control traffic flow. This makes streets and highways safer for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians.

*These signs use colors shapes, written information and symbols:*



7) Signs help drivers quickly understand and abide by the information they provide. It is important to watch for signs and road markings to determine the appropriate action to take.

## **CONSTRUCTION ZONES**

8) Construction zones pose dangers for both drivers and construction workers. When people are working on the road, it becomes a hazard. There may be narrower lanes, sharp turns or uneven surfaces. Other drivers are often distracted and drive unsafely. Workers and construction vehicles may get in the way.

9) ***Drive slowly and carefully near work zones.*** Reduce your speed further when there are workers in the roadway. You can even engage your four-way flashers or brake lights to warn drivers behind you.



*Watch for orange construction signs.  
They will warn you when you are  
approaching a construction area.*

## **PROCEDURAL HAZARDS**

**10)** During the video we show railroad tracks that are running parallel to the roadway. The driver is going to make a right hand turn at the light. The crossing is located directly after the turn. It is important to remember that ALL railroad crossings require the driver to stop, unless it is an exempt track or it is controlled by a signal light.

## **BICYCLISTS**

**11)** In the video, we show a bicyclist slowly weaving in and out of the bike lane. ***On most roadways, bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as other roadway users and often even share the same lane.*** But, bicyclists are hard to see. Riders have little protection and easily can be injured in a collision. Oncoming bicycle traffic is often overlooked and its speed is misjudged. When attempting to pass a bicyclist be sure to:

- a) approach slowly.
- b) leave a distance of about 3 feet between you and the bicycle.
- c) Maintain the 3 foot clearance until you have safely passed the bicycle

**12)** In the video we show the driver exercise patience due to the bicyclist weaving in and out of the bike lane. The school bus driver waits for the lane to open up to establish a 3 foot clearance, then slowly passes the bicyclist.

**13)** Equally important is the use of your mirrors when passing bicyclists. When making a turn, the bus driver needs to not only remember to engage the turn signal early enough to warn bicyclists, but the bus driver must also remember to monitor the mirrors closely.

## **PEOPLE**

**14)** Anytime you are stopping the bus you have to be mindful of your surroundings. In the video, we show an unstable man who is trying to get the driver to open the door. ***Don't open the door of the bus to strangers, it can lead to a dangerous situation. No one belongs on the school bus except for drivers or aides and the students that are being transported.***

## **RED LIGHT RUNNERS**

**15)** It is a federal law that all vehicles stop on both sides of the roadway when the bus's red stop signs are flashing and the lights are engaged. In the video, we show a motorist who did not obey this law. Red light runners pose a serious risk, because the red stop

lights and signs are usually only engaged to load or unload students. If you encounter a red light runner you should get any useful information you can. This includes:

- a) License Plate
- b) Color and Make of Vehicle
- c) Location and Time

**15a)** You should report this information immediately. Chances are that it will not be a one time occurrence. **Anyone who runs the red lights on a school bus is likely to repeat this again and again.**

### **ROUNABOUTS**

**16)** Although, not necessarily considered a hazard, Roundabouts are becoming more common on surface streets. Here are a few tips for traveling through them:

- a) first, slow down on approach to the intersection.
- b) you should keep to the right of the painted or raised island.
- c) look left for traffic approaching the circle.
- d) enter the roundabout by turning right when there is a safe gap in traffic approaching from your left.
- e) If there is no traffic approaching, you may enter without stopping.
- f) If there is traffic, yield to traffic already in the roundabout.

**16a)** Do not attempt to pass bicyclists or other vehicles when in the roundabout, and do not stop except to avoid a collision. **Remember, you have the right-of-way over entering traffic.** Make sure to use your right turn signal to indicate where you plan to exit the roundabout. If you happen to miss your exit, just continue around the circle until you reach it again. As you exit, yield to pedestrians who are in the crosswalk or are waiting to cross the exit lane.

### **CLEARANCES**

**17)** Whenever approaching a one lane tunnel or bridge, you have to first make sure that there is enough clearance to safely navigate through it. In the video we make a point of this with a single lane tunnel. Notice, the bus has plenty of space to fit through the tunnel safely. But, there is another point to be made here. The vehicle on the other side of the tunnel may be out of sight. Here is a suggested way to handle this situation.

**18)** You should only start to move through a tunnel or one lane bridge when you are sure that no other vehicle is about to enter the tunnel from the opposite side. If there are no vehicles coming from the opposite direction, you can slowly start traveling through the single lane tunnel. ***It is also a good idea to honk your horn to warn oncoming motorists that the tunnel is occupied.***

### **LOADING ZONES**

**19)** When entering or exiting busy loading zones, be sure to check your mirrors and do so with caution. Vehicles are in constant motion entering and leaving their parking spots. Students and parents can pop out from behind buses or vehicles at anytime. ***Always scan the area while maneuvering through loading zones and remain focused throughout.***

### **FREEWAYS**

**20)** Whenever you are cut off by another vehicle it becomes a hazard. This is why you must always maintain the correct following distance. ***Anytime a vehicle moves in front of the bus, you will need to re-establish your following distance.*** Scanning ahead on freeways for potential hazards is an art form in itself. You should always scan the roadway ahead for Traffic. Look for vehicles coming onto the highway, into your lane or turning. You can also watch for brake lights from slowing vehicles.

### **OBSTRUCTIONS**

**21)** In the video we show a driver who approaches a box in the center of the road. The box isn't that much of an obstruction, yet the last thing you want to do is run over it. The box may contain sharp or heavy objects that may puncture tires or damage the bus.

### **WEATHER AND VISIBILITY**

**22)** Driving in bad weather is a hazard in itself. When water or ice is on the roadway it makes driving ANY vehicle dangerous. You can improve your driving safety by slowing down and by increasing your following distance under such conditions.

**23)** When visibility is limited it makes scanning the roadway ahead much more challenging. This means that you will have less time to react when a hazard presents itself. Be sure to scan as far ahead as possible when driving in low visibility. You should adjust your speed and following distance so you have time to react. Also, just because you see tail lights in front of you, it may not be a clear indication of where the road is. The vehicle in front of you may not even be on the right side of the road.

## **ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUES AND ISSUES**

**24)** Whenever you are **merging or switching lanes**, you need to keep in mind the length of the school bus. Be sure to use your mirrors to make sure the gap in traffic is large enough for you to enter safely.

**25) Tight Maneuvers** are a necessity any time you are driving in close quarters. Delivery trucks, motorists and pedestrians can become a hazard at any moment. Be sure to check your mirrors often when in these areas. Make sure you have enough clearance to safely navigate around vehicles and ALWAYS keep your eyes open for pedestrians in tight driving areas.

**26) Low hanging branches** are another obstruction. School buses are expensive to fix or replace. The last thing the district wants is a scratched up or damaged school bus. Watch for low overhanging branches and be ready to react.

**26) Tailgating** another vehicle is a serious hazard. When traveling single lane roadways, you should always respect other motorists. If motorists have been following the school bus for a long stretch of roadway, be respectful and find a safe place to pull over to let them pass. Don't let their impatience cause a distraction or unsafe driving practices.

## **CLOSING**

Throughout the video, we have covered several hazards that drivers face on a daily basis. Maintaining focus and consistently scanning the roadway ahead is the key to identifying and reacting to them. Use the scanning methods we have suggested to recognize any potential hazards and choose the action to be applied.

**TEST QUESTIONS**

- 1) It is important that school bus drivers always scan the roadway  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 2) When scanning ahead, you should be looking 4-6 seconds ahead.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 3) You only need to be aware of what is happening AHEAD of the bus when scanning.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 4) The bus should be at a minimum of \_\_\_\_ feet when passing bicyclists.  
a) 2  
b) 3  
c) 4  
d) None of the above
- 5) When traveling through a ROUNDABOUT, you need to stop to let traffic in.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 6) School bus drivers do not need to adhere to road signs like other motorists.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 7) When cut off on the freeway you need to adjust your following distance.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 8) Never let a stranger on the bus, even if they are broken down or need help.  
**TRUE or FALSE**
- 9) When you encounter a red light runner, you should get their  
a) **Make and model of vehicle**  
b) **License Plate Number**  
c) **Location and Time**  
d) **All of the above**
- 10) Its a good technique to follow the taillights of the car in front of you in low visibility.  
**TRUE or FALSE**



**ANSWER KEY**

- 1) TRUE**
- 2) FALSE**
- 3) FALSE**
- 4) b**
- 5) FALSE**
- 6) FALSE**
- 7) TRUE**
- 8) TRUE**
- 9) d**
- 10) FALSE**