

# **How to Safely Evacuate a Special Needs Bus**

## **Reference Guide and Test**

## **Introduction**

As a special education bus driver you have a lot to remember; here are some of the key concepts you will need to apply when transporting special needs students. Some students have physical disabilities which requires you to drive the bus in a manner that will not injure students with low muscle tone or other physical ailments. Some students display emotional or behavioral disabilities which requires you to intervene and interact with them. Now, ask yourself this question.....**Do you know how YOU would react if you needed to perform an emergency evacuation of the school bus?**

## **Preparation and Inspection**

1) One of the keys to a successful school bus evacuation is preparation. There are several important aspects of preparation. One of these is the pre trip inspection of the special needs bus. Here are several of the items that need to be inspected. Each item plays an essential role during the evacuation of a special needs bus.

- a) Wheelchair lift should be in good working condition
- b) Emergency latches and exits should all be working - open and close with ease.
- c) Check all warning and stop lights
- d) Check ALL safety and first aid equipment
- e) Seat belt cutter must be available and easily accessible to the driver

## **Disabilities and Abilities of Special Needs Students**

2) Special education bus drivers must be aware of the disabilities of the students they are transporting. Some students are physically disabled and other students are mentally challenged. There may be other students who are visually or hearing impaired. **Learn everything you can about your students so that during an evacuation you can make decisions that will minimize risk to these students.**

3) Some special needs students can act as helpers and many non ambulatory students can assist themselves during an evacuation. And it is **important to remember that if an aid or monitor rides the bus, you should share this information with them.**

## **Preparation for Evacuations**

4) Knowing the locations of all emergency exits and seating arrangements can be critical when evacuating a school bus. If smoke limits the drivers visibility, the driver must have these locations committed to memory. This will ensure that the students can evacuate the bus in the

most efficient manner.

5) The order in which you evacuate students is an important consideration. If an evacuation becomes necessary, it is quicker and easier to first evacuate ambulatory students. Next, you should evacuate wheelchair students. However, if your ambulatory students have behavioral disorders, do not evacuate them first unless they are accompanied by an aid or the driver.

### **Mental Preparedness**

6) An emergency evacuation of the school bus can be a traumatic event. Special education bus drivers should rely on their training and knowledge of what actions to take during such a crisis. **The key is to stay calm and focused.** You should concentrate on the task at hand and not on the negative consequences that COULD take place. **Don't let the fear of the evacuation distract from your overall purpose of getting the students to safety.**

### **Maintain Personal Safety**

7) Speed becomes particularly important during an evacuation. And make sure you don't ignore your own personal safety when evacuating students off the bus. When lifting, kneeling or carrying students, you should use proper body mechanics. You should always lift with your legs and not your back. When kneeling, do so in a manner that will not require over stretching. Over stretching could strain your back. Do all you can to protect your back from injury, because as Martin mentioned, you can't evacuate the students if you are injured. Remember, don't rush and compromise proper body mechanics when evacuating the bus.

### **NON EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

8) A **non emergency evacuation**, is one in which the speed of the evacuation is not critical to the safety of the students.

9) During the video, Martin mentions a very important point. **The only time you should evacuate a bus, is when students will be safer being off of the bus, than being on the bus.** Two good examples include a bus that is stalled on a busy road way and another example is a bus that breaks down around a blind corner. In both these examples students are safer staying on the bus.

10) During the video we used a wide open location for the non emergency evacuation. This is to show the correct procedures for a general evacuation.

### 11) **When preparing to evacuate students, you should:**

- a) Alert dispatch of the evacuation. Let them know your location and any other viable information, such as injuries to students.
- b) Activate your hazards to warn motorists approaching the bus from either direction.
- c) Secure the bus and take the key from the ignition.
- d) Let students on the bus know that they will be evacuating the bus. Special needs students may be thrown off by the sudden change in routine.

12) The video made it obvious that there is no apparent or immediate danger. None of the students on the bus have major behavioral disabilities, so the driver evacuates her wheelchair student first. And if there were students with behavioral problems you would want to leave them on the bus anyway. They will be safer there than letting them off the bus in an unsupervised environment. ***If the speed of the evacuation is not critical, then evacuate the wheelchair students first and keep other students on board the bus.***

13) In the video, we show the driver release the tie downs and unload her wheelchair student first. She then comes into the bus and informs the other students that it is time to evacuate. Since there is no immediate emergency, the driver has the students evacuate out the front service door. She gives them a location to go to that is approximately 100 feet from the bus and far from the roadway. ***Martin mentions in the video that when evacuating the bus you should give students a tangible object to go to.....such as a tree or a sign.***

14) If a bus is experiencing mechanical problems, but is not in immediate danger, students should wait on that bus until another arrives. Once the backup bus arrives they can then be safely transferred.

### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

15) At the beginning of the video, we showed an emergency evacuation taking place when smoke began to fill the bus, placing students and the driver in a dangerous situation. Obviously, if smoke begins to fill the bus, there is a possibility of a fire on board.

16) The first decision to make is where to pull the bus over. In an emergency situation such as this, you want to get the bus over as soon as you have even a suspicion that there may be a fire on board. Then you would:

- a) alert dispatch of the situation. Be sure to let them know the area you are at and any injuries that may have occurred to the students or yourself.

- b) it is also a good idea to hang the radio out of the drivers window. By doing this, you can still communicate with dispatch if it safe and becomes necessary to do so.
- c) you can also do the same with the first aid kit in case students are already injured or an accidental injury takes place during the evacuation process.

17) In the video, Martin observes smoke coming from the front of the bus and close to where he is sitting. And that is why he makes the call to evacuate students at the rear of the bus to minimize the risk of the students walking out of the front service door and possibly sustaining injuries.

18) **Remember to give special needs students direct instructions.** They will not remember a laundry list of details. So, let them know what needs to be done right at that moment.

19) If you have special needs students that can understand directions well and can aid with the evacuation, utilize their help. During the video Martin wants the students off of the bus as quickly as possible. He makes the decision to do the evacuation himself. The point is also made that the students shown in the video have been trained in evacuation procedures. This shows the value of practicing evacuations with special needs students. The evacuation at the rear of the bus runs smoothly and efficiently.

21) **Martin has the students wait at a tree, which is far from the bus and any traffic that may be traveling on roadways.**

22) After Martin gets the ambulatory students off of the bus, he has them wait next to a tree. This places them a safe distance from traffic. Next, he has to evacuate his wheelchair student. In the scenario provided, there is only one wheelchair student on board. He obviously would not use the lift due to the time it would take to go through the unloading process. So, he improvises. He uses the wheelchair lift cover to lay the student on it then drags him to the rear of the bus.

23) Martin has the student wrap his arms around the his neck. He then uses his legs to lift the student and gently lay him on the lift cover. Once there, Martin then uses the lift cover to drag the student out the rear emergency exit. He grabs the student under the arms and drags him out of the bus safely.

24) The one thing that you can notice about the evacuation is how martin stays calm and focused throughout the evacuation process. And remember this: evacuations present different challenges and the driver has to adapt to each situation. The adage that one shoe fits all situations isn't applicable in school bus evacuations.

**CLOSING**

In the video, we showed several procedures and demonstrations of how to evacuate a special needs bus. We went over the importance of knowing student disabilities as well as the abilities of the students who ride the bus. We touched on the importance of maintaining the bus and the equipment on it. We also went over how bus drivers should protect themselves during an evacuation. And now, it is up to you, the special needs bus driver to apply these procedures and techniques if you are ever faced with an evacuation of any kind. Remember to stay calm and focused. The children rely on your composure and direction. Think outside the box if it becomes necessary to get all students off the bus in an emergency situation.

## TEST QUESTIONS

1) You should not call on special needs students to be helpers during an evacuation because they wont understand what to do

**TRUE or FALSE**

2) it is quicker and easier to first evacuate ambulatory students

**TRUE or FALSE**

3) Get students off the bus as fast as possible even if it results in personal injury.

**TRUE or FALSE**

4) A ***non emergency evacuation***, is one in which the speed of the evacuation is not critical to the safety of the students.

**TRUE or FALSE**

5) The only time you should evacuate a bus, is if students will be safer being off of the bus, than on it.

**TRUE or FALSE**

6) When preparing to evacuate students, you should:

**a) Alert dispatch of the evacuation.**

**b) Activate your hazards to warn motorists**

**c) Secure the bus and take the key from the ignition.**

**d) Let students on the bus know that they will be evacuating the bus.**

**e) All of the above**

7) If the speed of the evacuation is not critical, then evacuate the wheelchair students first.

**TRUE or FALSE**

8) You should tell students to walk approximately 100 from where the bus is stopped, during an evacuation event.

**TRUE or FALSE**

9) It is much quicker to evacuate a wheelchair student first during an emergency evacuation.

**TRUE or FALSE**

10) it is also a good idea to hang the radio out of the drivers window.

**TRUE or FALSE**

**ANSWER KEY**

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