

Chalkboard

By

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You may or may not have been aware of it, but last week was National School Bus Safety Week. Why should a week be set aside to focus on bus safety? Let me share an article that I copied verbatim off a site found at http://www.onlinelawyersource.com/personal_injury/bus.html.

“Every school day, roughly 440,000 yellow school buses transport more than 24 million students to and from school and school-related activities, accounting for more than 8.8 billion student trips per year. School bus transportation has proven to be the safest way to transport a child, especially given the high number of trips taken. In the decade between 1991 and 2001, an average of 26 children died each year in school bus accident, 19 as pedestrians - getting on or off a school bus - and seven as passengers - a small number in comparison to the average of 800 school-age children who are killed each year as passengers in other motor vehicles, walking or riding their bicycle during school transportation hours. Half of all school-age pedestrians killed in school bus accidents were between the ages of 5 and 7. The low number of passenger fatalities could be due to the low speed at which buses usually travel as well as the large size of the bus itself. This size, however, often poses a threat to other motor vehicles sharing the road with the school bus. In fact, of the 1,479 total school bus accident fatalities occurring between 1991 and 2001, 68 percent were occupants of other vehicles involved. In all, one-third of the 406,000 fatal traffic crashes that occurred between 1991 and 2001 were classified as school-transportation related. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a school transportation-related crash is a crash which involves, either directly or indirectly, a school bus body vehicle, or a non-school bus functioning as a school bus, transporting children to or from school or school-related activities. Although school bus accident rates are considerably low, school bus accidents are still devastating for all involved. In an effort to further prevent students from sustaining injuries or fatalities in school bus accidents, school bus safety advocates are fighting to implement seat belts in the design of all yellow school buses, arguing that the school bus design has not changed since 1977.”

The web page had a 2003 copyright so the numbers in both the number transported and the numbers of fatalities have increased to the

present. I am sure that you would agree with me that even one person losing their life in a bus accident is one too many.

For Gentry, it is fair to say that the drivers' greatest fear is to have a vehicle attempt to pass a bus when the bus is stopped to load or unload students. When the bus is in motion the driver has some control over circumstances; when it is stopped the driver loses most of that control to the operators of the vehicles with whom the bus shares the roadway. The quoted article reaffirms that fear- 73% of the fatalities occurred to the students while they were getting on or off the bus.

Several of our buses have stops located on city streets, on Highway 59, on Highway 12, and on Highway 43. Please take extra care when you are in the vicinity of the bus whether it is stopped or not. If it is stopped with the red signal lights flashing, you are required by law to stop also.

If you do pass a stopped Gentry bus, the driver attempts to get your license number and a description of your vehicle. The bus radio is used to call in that information to the bus shop where a phone call is immediately made to the city police department, the county sheriff's office, or the Arkansas State Police depending on who has jurisdiction of the roadway where the violation occurred. Our district will pay the driver's respective hourly rate to that driver should he or she be called to testify in court in the prosecution of someone who passes one of our stopped buses.

We have also recently ordered three "outside" cameras to place on our buses whose routes have recently experienced several occurrences of being passed while stopped. These digital cameras will interface with our new camera systems that were purchased this year for all our route buses at a cost slightly over \$50,000.

Our school is as serious as possible about trying to maintain a safe environment both inside and outside our buses. We have to be. Counting morning and afternoon routes, fourteen buses travel over 700 round trip miles transporting almost 1400 Gentry students daily. There is no price tag that can be placed on the life of a child.