

Opinion: Pay attention around school buses

By National Transportation Safety Board

As a brand new school year begins, the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reminds parents, students and motorists to be alert and to put safety first in school zones and near school bus stops.

School buses are the safest means of transportation for getting to and from school and keep an estimated 17.3 million cars off the roads every year. Even so, students need to be careful when entering the "school bus danger zone" – 10 feet in front, behind or on either side of the bus. In addition, motorists need to be alert and always stop for a school bus when flashing lights are illuminated.

According to NHTSA data, over the past 10 years, 44 school-aged children and teens between the ages of 5-19 were killed in school zones traveling to or from school. Out of that number 77 percent (34) were pedestrians either struck by a school bus or another vehicle.

Teach children how to stay safe around a school bus:

- Stand at least six feet (three giant steps) from the approaching school bus while waiting at the bus stop.
- Wait to board the bus until the driver says it is safe.
- When getting off of the bus, cross the street in front of the bus and make sure the bus driver sees you.
- Always watch for oncoming traffic when approaching or leaving the bus.

How motorists can keep kids safe around the school bus:

- When driving in neighborhoods with bus stops, schools and school zones, watch out for children walking or bicycling to school.
- Slow down. Look for children walking in the street, especially if there are no sidewalks in the neighborhood.
- Remember, children do not easily estimate vehicle speeds and often misjudge when it is safe to cross the street when a vehicle is approaching.

Learn and obey the school bus laws. Obey the “flashing signal light system” that school bus drivers use to alert motorists of pending actions:

- Yellow flashing lights indicate that the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.
- Red flashing lights and extended stop arms indicate that the bus has stopped, and that children are getting on or off. Motorists must stop their cars and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the extended stop sign is withdrawn, and the bus begins moving before they can start driving again.