

## Minimizing Bus Driver Distractions

According to the National Highway Transportation Administration (NHTA), fatalities caused by distracted drivers is the leading cause of vehicular death in the United States and accounts for over 25% of police reported accidents. There are three (3) general categories that account for driving while distracted (DWD).

- **Visual distractions which involve taking your eyes off of the road**
- **Manual distractions which involve taking your hands off of the wheel**
- **Cognitive distractions which involve taking your mind off what you are doing**

In relation to driving a bus these distractions are compounded and may be more difficult to control due to the dynamics associated with transporting K-12 students. The following is a list of best practices that should be considered to eliminate bus driver distractions and reduce the likelihood of accidents within the district.

1. Bus driver use of cell phones and handheld devices is absolutely prohibited while on or operating the bus. School districts should mandate a zero tolerance policy and obtain union support to back the policy. This includes talking on the cell phone with a hands free device. In fact, studies demonstrate that the use of a hands free device while driving does not reduce the likelihood of an accident.
2. All portable and personal radios, CD players, MP3 players or other like devices are prohibited from use by the bus driver while operating the bus. These as well as other cellular devices must not be on the person during operations and should be left in the driver's personal locker, at their home or in their personal vehicle prior to coming to work.
3. Newspapers, books, magazines and the like are not to be in the proximity of the bus driver while operating the unit.
4. Eating, drinking and/or smoking are prohibited by the bus driver while operating the bus.
5. Policies should be set in place by the district specifying rules of conduct in which all occupants must abide by during bussing activities. Rules of conduct should be posted in each of the units. Parents and students must read, agree to, and sign rules of conduct prior to being allowed the privilege of riding on the bus.
6. For infrequent transportation needs, such as a sporting or scholastic event or field trip, teachers or an alternative responsible party (coach, administrator, etc.), must review the rules of conduct with participating students and obtain parent/student signature prior to allowing transportation privileges.
7. Driver protocol and training should be developed to provide the driver with directives as to how he or she will handle and escalate disciplinary practices for non-compliant or disobedient students.
8. The bus driver must not interact, yell or motion to the students while the bus is being operated.
9. In the event that the bus driver feels that there is an unsafe activity or distraction while operating the bus, he or she must pull over to a safe spot and park the vehicle prior to addressing the situation.
10. An accurate log of unsafe activities should be maintained and communicated to school administration by the close of each work day. The log should include identifying the unsafe activity, name of the student involved and how it was corrected or handled. District administrators are responsible for discipline and/or termination of the student or students' transportation privileges.

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The safety of our students and drivers is of utmost importance. The above practices can proactively reduce the likelihood of bus driver distractions and associated accidents and should be considered by all members as you work with us and strive to reduce the risk of injuries during school transportation.

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This Tribal First Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice. For more information on this topic, please contact Tribal First Risk Control Consulting at (888) 737-4752 or [riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com](mailto:riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com).