



Recommended Procedures for School Bus Drivers at Railroad Crossings

In 2006, there were 2,897 train/vehicle collisions that occurred at railroad crossings. These 2,897 collisions resulted in 362 fatalities and 999 injuries. Unfortunately, some of the crashes involve school buses that result in injuries and fatalities to students. In an effort to avert these crashes, the following procedures are recommended to school bus drivers. It is important to note that these recommendations must be considered within the context of individual state laws and regulations.

1. When making stops for railroad crossings, carefully observe all traffic. Use school bus hazard warning lamps, and tap the brakes to communicate to traffic that the bus is about to stop. Take these actions far enough in advance to avoid startling motorists behind the bus, which could cause panic stops or rear-end collisions.
2. Bring the bus to a full and complete stop before crossing any track, whether or not the bus is carrying passengers. Stop the bus within not less than 15 feet or more than 50 feet from the rails nearest the front of the bus.
3. On multiple-lane roads, stop only in the right lane unless it is necessary to make a left turn immediately after crossing the railroad tracks.
4. After stopping the bus, fully open the service door and the driver's side window, turn off all noisy equipment (radios, fans, etc.), instruct students to be quiet, and look and listen in both directions along the track or tracks for approaching trains. In instances where school bus loading/unloading red warning lamps are activated by opening the service door, deactivate such lamps by using the master control switch.
5. If the view of the railroad track or tracks is not adequate, do not attempt to cross the tracks until you can see that no train is approaching.
6. If a train passes from one direction, make sure that another train, possibly hidden by the first train, is not approaching on an adjacent track.
7. For railroad crossings equipped with warning devices such as lights, bells, and/or gates, always obey the signals. Never ignore railroad crossing signals. If a police officer or flagman is present at the crossing, obey their directions, but be sure to make your own visual check.

8. Before crossing the tracks, ensure there is adequate room on the other side of the tracks and train right-of-way for the entire bus. It is always possible that the bus may have to stop immediately after crossing the railroad tracks.
9. When the tracks are clear, completely close the bus service entry door and place the transmission in a gear that will not require changing gears while crossing the tracks. In instances where school bus loading/unloading red warning lamps are activated by opening the service door and such lamps were deactivated by using the master control switch, reactivate the school bus loading/unloading lamps. Leave all noisy equipment turned off and continue looking in all directions as the bus crosses the tracks. After safely crossing the tracks, turn off the hazard warning lamp.
10. If the bus stalls while crossing the tracks, evacuate the students and move them a safe distance away from the bus as quickly as possible. If a radio or telephone is available, notify the school bus dispatcher of the situation. If a train is approaching, have everyone walk in the direction of the train at a 45 degree angle away from the train tracks.
11. Weather conditions, such as fog, snow, rain, and wind can affect the driver's ability to see and hear an approaching train and to determine the safety of crossing railroad tracks. Additional caution must be exercised during such conditions.
12. Report malfunctioning railroad signals or hazardous railroad crossing conditions to the appropriate school transportation personnel.

Additional information and training materials on railroad crossing safety are available from:

Operation Lifesaver, Inc.
1420 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
1-800-537-6224
Website: www.operationlifesaver.com

Although the information and recommendations contained in this publication have been compiled from sources believed to be reliable, other or additional safety measures may be required under particular circumstances. Reviewed in April 2008 by the School Transportation Section of the Transportation Safety Division.