

Illegal Passing of School Buses: Children at Risk

START STOPPING!

A stopped school bus with its flashing red lights engaged is a sign to motorists that children are going to be getting onto or stepping down from the school bus. When motorists fail to stop for such school buses, they present a real-time danger to the children who ride our school buses, and they are committing a serious crime.

Highway safety and school bus safety advocates report that motorists pass school buses some 50,000 times each day in New York State. Research projects using Stop Arm cameras and license plate readers on school buses to scan traffic support this number and suggest it may be even higher. Increasingly, motorists are also passing stopped school buses on the right (or passenger) side of the school bus which presents an extreme danger for our children who are boarding and departing the bus from that side of the vehicle.

The Law: New York State Law (Sec. 1174/Vehicle and Traffic Law) requires that all motorists come to a full stop when approaching a school bus that has its red flashing lights engaged. This law applies to vehicles approaching from either direction and whether on two lane or multi-lane roads. The law allows the courts to impose fines starting at \$250 for the first violation and rising to \$1000 for the third violation plus points on licenses and possible imprisonment.

School transportation professionals take numerous steps to ensure the safety of the children each day. They train drivers to the highest standards, inspect and maintain school buses to rigorous federal and state specifications, and plan daily routes that are as efficient and safe as possible. Despite all our other efforts, the one thing we cannot do on our own is to make motorists STOP for stopped school buses. The school bus is equipped with several key features that clearly should remind motorists that it is stopping to pick up or drop off children:

- It's large size and bright CHROME YELLOW in its coloring;
- It has front and rear signs that identify it as a "SCHOOL BUS;"
- It displays FLASHING RED LIGHTS in the upper front and upper rear corners of the bus;
- It has large STOP signs that emerge from the left side of the bus and often have their own flashing lights for visibility.

Some school buses are being equipped with right side STOP arms. The school transportation community is concerned that even with all these identifiers, motorists complain that they didn't see the school bus or that they did not know it was a school bus or that it was picking up children. Motorists have been reported as saying that "no one got hurt, so what's the big deal?" or "everyone does it and no one has gotten hurt."

The facts are that children are injured each year by illegally passing motorists and we have had two fatalities in the past ten years. One of those fatalities involved a seven year old girl who was struck by a car that had passed her school bus on the passenger side and struck and killed her as she was stepping down onto the pavement. Additionally, school bus drivers report that they frequently must shut the bus doors to stop children from leaving the bus when cars are passing on the passenger side. Were it not for their quick reactions, more students might be hurt or killed. This is simply not acceptable. It's time for the adults who drive motor vehicles to act responsibly when approaching a stopped school bus!

NYAPT calls on all motorists to START STOPPING for that yellow SCHOOL BUS with its red lights flashing in the corners and the big red STOP signs extending from the sides. That school bus could be carrying your neighbor's child or a family member and when you pass that school bus, you could find yourself striking and even killing someone you know and love. The fines we will charge you for passing the bus won't make a difference to you but you will never forget the fact that your car harmed a child because you could not be bothered to stop for her school bus.

Please: START STOPPING! It's the Law! And it's the right thing to do!

Although, motorists continue to illegally pass buses whose red lights and stop signs are deployed, the yellow school bus remains the safest mode of transportation for students.

FACT: School buses are the safest mode of transportation for getting children back and forth to school.
(SOURCE: American School Bus Council)

STUDENT FATALITIES

ANNUAL AVERAGE DURING NORMAL SCHOOL TRAVEL HOURS

