

Tornado's and School Transportation

At times certain weather conditions may occur which will necessitate the cancellation or delay of school bus routes, school athletic, extracurricular activities, or field trips. This document provides suggested safety protocols and procedures on tornados.

Procedures Prior To Any Emergency

It is said that the only thing harder than planning for an emergency is explaining why you did not.

Prior to being involved in any emergency situation, whether it is a crash, first aid or weather related, is it important that basic procedures are in place and practiced. Best practice suggests:

- each school bus carries an up-to-date roster of passengers, whether the function is a daily route or activity trip.
- each school bus carries an up-to-date contact list for school officials and emergency responders consisting of at least telephone numbers (land line and mobile). To the extent practical similar information is available when traveling on out-of-district activity trips.
- that students, including those that would only ride a school bus for activity trips, participate in school bus evacuation drills at least twice a school year.
- that on activity trips, all passengers (students, adults, teachers, coaches, chaperones, etc.) are advised of: the school bus emergency exit locations and their operation. (e.g., service door, push out windows, side and rear emergency doors, and roof hatches) The school bus driver should demonstrate the operation of each type of exit.
- the location of first aid kit, seat belt cutter and fire extinguisher.
- the location and operation of the bus two-way radio or other communication equipment, if so equipped.

Tornado

According to the National Weather Service, tornadoes can occur any time of day or night, any time of the year. In Oklahoma, peak tornado occurrences are from April to June and between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Guidance

1. The school district should have a written severe weather policy that includes school transportation procedures for routes, athletic, field trip and extracurricular activities.
2. Prior to the threat of severe weather the responsibility of the school bus driver:
 - is to be thoroughly familiar with all roads adjoining their route in the event they are needed to seek shelter. For athletic, extracurricular activities, and field trips the school bus driver should have a map available to determine alternate routes to safety;

- has pre-determined shelter options (buildings, schools, businesses, homes) along various parts of the route should evacuation be necessary and to the extent practical similar options when on activity trips. In emergency situations most people will offer others shelter when asked;
 - is to know the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning. A “watch” means tornadoes are possible in your area; remain alert for approaching storms. A “warning” means a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar.
3. School administrators and school bus drivers are to routinely monitor weather reports for the prediction of severe weather or announcements of weather advisories. Once en route (daily route or activity trip) the school district should have a means to communicate this information to the school bus driver.
 4. When a ‘tornado watch’ is issued a school bus driver is to be prepared for a sudden change in weather condition and alert for the appearance of violent wind, rain, hail, or a funnel shaped cloud.
 5. When a ‘tornado warning’ is issued a school bus driver is to promptly seek shelter for the passengers.
 - If the warning is announced at or near the dismissal of school the school day students are to remain in the building in a designated safe area.
 - If the warning is announced while en route a school bus driver is to go to a pre-identified shelter or building closest to their current location depending on the immediacy of the tornado threat.
 - If caught in the direct path of a tornado or one is sighted and pre-identified shelter is not accessible the school bus driver is to:
 - a. stop and evacuate the passengers. Do not attempt to ‘out run’ the tornado. Do not remain on the school bus. If the bus is radio equipped advise the school transportation office of your bus number and location.
 - b. Seek safety in a below ground level area, such as a ditch, ravine, or depression in a location that is:
 - away from the bus; and
 - where practical on the side of the road without power lines, utility poles, trees etc.
 - c. Do not use above ground locations for shelter. (e.g., road or bridge over passes)
 - d. Instruct passengers to lie flat face first and to protect their head by using a jacket, other clothing, or their hands and arms. Advise passengers to ‘not sneak a peek’ at the tornado.
 6. After the emergency:
 - Account for all passengers, check for injuries, and provide first aid if needed. Obtain medical attention if needed.
 - Before leaving a shelter or the immediate area if out in the open, the bus driver should monitor the local sky for a few minutes in the direction the tornado came from to ensure a second tornado does not follow a similar path.
 - Be alert for continued storm activity, downed power lines, ruptured gas lines, or structural damage to trees, buildings, roads and bridges.

- Establish communication with the transportation office and determine the next steps to take with the children.