

Driver Safety

Extra Care

When snow falls sufficiently to create slippery conditions, the inevitable reports of numerous vehicle accidents pop up on the news. It's always amazing how many drivers seem to continue to drive as if the temperature were in the 70s, the road conditions dry, the traffic light, and the sight distance one-half mile or more. "In bad weather, use extra care" is an edict that has been promoted in the safety field for years. And while it may be common sense, it does not appear to be common practice. As this article will note, weather is not the only condition that calls for "extra care."

The most critical time when extra care is needed by school bus drivers is during the loading and unloading of students. Statistics note that most students are injured by their own bus, and these accidents occur during the loading/unloading times. Proper use of lights, swing arms, counting of students, and recognition and caution of any unusual situations are the strategies to minimize this procedure from becoming an accident.

Extra care is also needed when road conditions change. These changes may be due to weather, construction, or overall condition. Different road conditions call for different driving. Roads wet with fresh rain can be just as slippery as ice due to oil embedded in the road. Even leaves can cause slipping hazards. Slippery surfaces, rough surfaces, narrow lanes and short sight distances demand slower speeds, longer following distances, and greater control of the vehicle.

Hazards presented by objects, people, emergency vehicles, or animals along the side of the road demand extra care. When these items are on your side of the road, they can create a double hazard if oncoming traffic is passing at the same time you are



passing these items. Slow down and take the hazards individually so you will not be at the same location as the road hazard and oncoming traffic. Give road hazards room by maneuvering as far away from them as safely possible and slow down. By the way, this is now the law in most states.

Exercise extra care if you are operating your bus at times not normal for school bus operations. Other drivers may anticipate the frequent stops of school buses in the morning and afternoon, but not in the middle of the day or at night. Weather delays, activity runs, and similar reasons for operations during non-typical hours should prompt drivers to use extra care.

Extra Care (continued)

Traffic conditions and geographic changes should prompt different driving skills (e.g., driving in city traffic vs. driving in the country). Extra care should be exercised when you change conditions or geography or when the traffic conditions in those areas you are operating change. Greater awareness of the vehicles around you, slower speeds, and proper signaling will help minimize hazards created by changes in traffic conditions.

Backing up deserves its own extra care just because of the nature of this maneuver. The best option is to avoid having to back up, because if you have to do so, your vision will be limited. Therefore you must “Get Out and Look” (your GOAL) before you back up. Proceed SLOWLY, minimize noise and open windows to hear what is going on. If you get assistance, keep the person visible at all times and agree first on hand signals. Don’t assume anything.

Any situation that creates diversions for you or other drivers requires extra care. Accidents, construction,

breakdowns, and similar incidents require you to step up your guard and be alert for hazards. Pay attention to your vehicle and situation and not the diversion.

We have already noted the dangers found on rain-slicked roads, but in winter, ice and snow are additional hazards you must deal with. With these, vision is more limited and road conditions are slippery. So increase following distances, reduce speeds, and maintain your cushion of safety around your vehicle as much as possible. If conditions get so poor that driving is not safe, follow your company procedure.

Using extra care in hazardous situations comes down to paying closer attention to your and others’ actions, and practicing safe behaviors. These include increasing following distances, taking one hazard at a time, maintaining your cushion of safety, reducing your speed, and covering the brake. Remember to “use extra care” when the situation warrants.