

## Extracurricular/Activity Runs

This article will review some of the safety issues and concerns with the extracurricular or activity transportation operations many school bus operations provide. Transportation of the football or other sports team, band, or other school groups for purposes other than pickup and delivery of students to and from school can present hazards not necessarily associated with standard stop and route school bus driving. Many of the trips involve driving at night. The trip itself is not regular and may include routes and hazards not familiar to the driver. Many of these trips involve “convoy travel,” that is, multiple buses traveling together. Access to the area of destination and parking for the bus may be problematic. And finally, kids and the escorting chaperones may be in a different frame of mind and behave differently than during trips to and from school.

The trips taken after school will often involve driving at night, especially the trip home. Visibility is reduced and seeing hazards is more difficult. Drivers must adjust their driving by not looking directly into oncoming headlights, reducing speed, increasing following distance to at least 5 seconds (as long as no other hazards exist), staying more attentive to potential hazards (e.g., animals, pedestrians), and double checking all maneuvers.

Because the trip is not routine, drivers should check their route to make sure they know where they are going. Since they may not be as familiar with the route as they are with their daily run, they need to be more attentive to any hazards such as height restriction, detours, road construction, tight turns, etc.

Multi-bus convoys are often used to transport the team, equipment, etc., traveling to these extra activities. In most cases, a driver most familiar with the route or most experienced takes the lead and the other buses follow. Traveling together can lead to serious accidents should one bus rear-end another. Adequate following distances must be maintained (4 seconds or more) to ensure this does not happen. Pre-planning should reduce any anxiety of getting

left behind and if a trailing vehicle loses the remaining convoy, communication devices can normally be used to find the convoy.

Parking and turning around at the stadium or school may be restricted due to limited parking, double parking, illegal parking, etc. Drivers should be sure they can maneuver out of any space they are told to pull into and be extra careful of sideswiping parked cars, hitting pedestrians, etc. Even if such areas are normally accessible, the activity of the event will likely reduce overall accessibility and maneuverable room and create additional hazards more difficult to see in the dark. Close clearances can cause damage to mirrors, etc. Check clearances before you leave even if you checked when you parked, as things may have changed.

Students at such events can behave more aggressively and their mood can be affected by the sports team’s or group’s activity at the event (i.e., winning or losing). Opposing group’s or team’s fans can also create concerns. Vandalism can be more prevalent and buses/vehicles should be adequately secured and watched. On the bus, students tend to think they can “get away with things because they are unseen in the dark.” Chaperones are normally helpful in controlling student behavior, but the school district and/or school bus operation should manage the provision of chaperones depending on their state’s laws. Rules established for the students should be presented to riders before the trip and enforced.

The issues discussed above may also apply to charter or non-school transportation. In addition, charter runs normally fall under the requirements of the Federal Carrier Motor Safety Regulations (FMRSR). These regulations stipulate specific driver qualification requirements that may be different than for school transportation, such as formal written pre-trip inspections, the keeping of logs (distance dependent), etc.