

Emergencies and Evacuation

As a driver, you have an important responsibility for the welfare and safety of your passengers. You must be prepared to provide evacuation assistance to all passengers in your vehicle. Training helps you to fulfill that responsibility.

Evacuation should be considered hazardous under the best of conditions. Hazards increase if the evacuation must be done hurriedly.

The Decision to Evacuate

Each organization should establish guidelines to deal with a situation that might require the driver to remove passengers from the vehicle. When there is fire present, there is leaking fuel, or the vehicle is in an unsafe location, then the need to evacuate is clearly indicated. Assessing a possible emergency in other situations may be less clear; for example, a tornado sighting or threat of flooding. Weather conditions, traffic, road hazards, availability of assistance, response time of public safety services, passenger characteristics and needs, and driver experience will enter into the decision to evacuate.

Vehicle Location

Once you become aware of a possible emergency and you have stopped your vehicle, note its location. Be aware of its position relative to the nearest cross street, road or widely recognized landmark.

Another important factor in vehicle location will be the terrain characteristics. The following must be considered when determining what to do.

1. Are you stopped on a hill? Are you facing uphill or downhill?
2. Are you stopped on the shoulder? Is the shoulder wide enough to accommodate the vehicle? Is the shoulder flat or on an incline? Is the shoulder grassy, rocky, bushy, a ditch?
3. Are you on a curve? Can oncoming traffic see you clearly in sufficient time to avoid you?
4. Does the road have a crown?
5. Are you on a divided highway, multilane undivided highway, or two-lane road?
6. Is your vehicle completely off the road or in an area it can be struck by another vehicle? Is it in a ditch or driveway?

The above conditions must be considered in conjunction with the vehicle's position, i.e., is it level, front end down, front end up, tilted on its side to some degree, resting on its side, left or right, or resting on its top.

Evacuation of Passengers in Wheelchairs

Passengers in wheelchairs present two elements for assessment. First, can the lift be utilized in the evacuation process? Cold weather will cost significant loss of time to deploy the lift. If the emergency was caused by a collision, the impact may have rendered the lift inoperable. The electrical system could now be a danger due to shorting. There is a potential for fire due to ignition of leaking fuel. You or passengers could be injured due to high amperage of the electrical current.

Second, how do you remove the passenger from the vehicle? If the vehicle impact forces were high, the wheelchair may have sustained damage that may not be readily apparent. Do not waste time removing seatbelts and tie-downs only to find the wheelchair is inoperable. Also, passengers may be reluctant to leave their wheelchairs behind because without them they are totally immobile. However saving the passenger's life is paramount. If time and conditions permit, the wheelchair can be removed later.

Communicating with Passengers and Attendants

In an emergency, most passengers will look to you, the driver, for directions. You represent authority and must take initial control and the lead. Being well trained in evacuation emergencies will make it easier for you to remain calm.

Remaining (or Appearing) Calm is Critical

Time and conditions permitting, tell passengers in a calm, clear, concise and confident manner that there is an emergency. Giving a brief explanation telling them what they need to do will help reduce passenger hysteria. Passengers should be advised that help is on the way, but for their safety, they need to leave the vehicle. Inform those passengers who need your assistance that it will be provided. Continuing to reassure the passengers while performing your duties will also forestall panic.

Care must be employed when deciding to use ambulatory passengers or passersby in the evacuation process. Unnecessary injury will be prevented if you remain calm and give clear, concise instructions to those helping. Lead by example when teaching hand, feet or body placement. Be clear with your commands during lifts and other maneuvers. (Using a "3 count" method will be easier to synthesize actions than using a single word command like "go" or "lift".)

Be Calm

Remember – as the driver of your vehicle, you are responsible for directing passengers and passersby. However, once public safety personnel arrive, you will turn over command and control of the emergency to them. At this point, your responsibility shifts to the care and needs of your passengers.

There are three methods of evacuating a bus under "normal" emergency situations. These are: (1) front door evacuation, (2) rear door evacuation, and (3) front and rear door evacuation.

During a bus evacuation **DRILL**, for reasons of safety, only the front door evacuation procedure is used. The following procedures should be followed during a front door bus evacuation drill:

1. The driver should set the parking brake and the key is not in the ignition.
2. The driver would then open the front door; stand and face the consumers and give the following command: *"Remain seated. This is an emergency, front door evacuation drill."*
3. The driver should then explain the alternate seat method of leaving the bus. In this method, consumers will leave the bus in an orderly manner from the front of the bus by alternating left-right seats on the bus.
4. The driver will dismiss consumers starting with the right-hand front seat; tap the shoulder of the consumer nearest the aisle. Direct the consumers to walk carefully off the bus, using the handrail as they exit the bus. The consumers are directed to move 100 feet away from the bus.
5. Where possible, the driver, with assistance from the bus attendant or agency staff, should assign and train a consumer assistant to stand just outside the front of the service entrance to count and assist consumers as they leave the bus.
6. The driver should move down the aisle, dismissing rows of consumers alternatively until the bus is empty.
7. As consumers leave the bus, they should proceed in an orderly manner behind the bus attendant or a designated consumer assistant to a distance of at least 100 feet from the side of the bus. Whenever possible, remain on the same side of the roadway as the bus.
8. Consumers should remain quietly in a group until further directions. Never allow consumers to play around during a drill – this is an exercise that must be taken seriously.

WHEELCHAIR EVACUATION PROCEDURE

Consumers who ride to and from the agency in a wheelchair or other mobile seating device must be given special consideration when it is necessary to evacuate them from a bus either in a drill or in a real emergency.

1. Lift Assisted — If the lift on the bus is operational, the driver should lower it about half way. This will allow for a “two-step” descend with each wheelchair. The bus aide and driver should decide who will be the one to lower each chair and who will be stationed on the ground to assist in keeping the lift guard in a closed position and assist in a smooth landing of the chairs to the ground.

2. Non-Lift Assisted — In an emergency, if the lift is not operational, the driver and consumer’s bus attendant must remove the consumers from their chairs as quickly and safely as possible. The consumers must then be removed from the bus by the most convenient and safest exit. A blanket or coat can be used to assist the driver and/or aide in moving these consumers to safety. Consumers may be lifted from their wheelchair, placed on the blanket and dragged down the aisle to the front or rear exit and then safely removed from the bus. Since this procedure may cause injuries to very fragile consumers, this type of procedure should only be used in real emergencies when there is no other alternative method of evacuation.

3. During a Drill — The driver should evacuate the consumer using the lift in the fully functional mode. Remember to never leave a consumer on the lift alone.

Directions to Bus Drivers for Emergency Evacuation Drills

As much as we try to avoid them, a traffic accident can happen to anyone at any time. Should a driver be involved in an accident, his/her first and primary responsibility is for the safety and well being of the consumers on the bus. It’s almost impossible to predict the exact sequence of events immediately following a traffic accident; therefore, it would be almost impossible to predict the exact sequence of procedures to follow at every accident. Each driver is instructed to develop a priority list of actions that must be taken after an accident. Included in this list are the following:

- Remain calm and secure the bus
- Check for any indication of fire or smoke
- Decide as quickly as possible if it is necessary to evacuate the bus
- Check for injuries and monitor the consumer’s physical and emotional condition
- Cooperation fully with police and/or fire department paramedics
- When required, try to find out what hospital consumers are taken to for assistance

Consumers should usually be kept on the bus during an emergency. However, there are some situations when it would be safer to evacuate the bus.

The driver will evacuate the bus if:

1. There is any indication that the bus is on fire or in danger of catching fire
2. The bus cannot be moved to a safe place, out of the way of traffic
3. A natural emergency requires evacuation.

Should evacuation be necessary, the driver will instruct the consumers and attendant to move at least 100 feet away from the side of the bus; however, the consumers should

not cross the roadway unless absolutely necessary. In most cases the driver will be able to determine the safest location for shelter from the emergency situation.

REMEMBER – The most important part of a safe bus evacuation is developing, and practicing a safe evacuation drill procedure before an emergency actually occurs.

SAFE TRANSPORTATION FOR ALL CONSUMERS

It has been pointed out several times already that SAFETY is the primary responsibility of any adult (driver, bus aide/attendant, nurse, etc.) that rides the bus. Making sure that consumers are picked up and dropped off safely, and providing them with a safe environment while riding the bus to and from agency must be everyone's primary concern. Each adult must judge for him/herself if a situation is safe, and must act in the best interest of the consumers. You must always rely on your own good judgment in determining whether or not to leave the bus to assist a child. Each situation is unique and needs to be evaluated separately depending on the circumstances and location at that particular time.

If in doubt about a situation, notify the direct supervisor, transportation director/coordinator or agency director.

BUS EVACUATION

Pre-Emergency Evacuation Plan

The most important part of evacuation is developing and following a plan. Having a pre-emergency plan for each bus and its route that includes all population of consumers transported will save precious time. In many emergencies only 2 to 5 minutes is available to complete an evacuation before possible serious injury to consumers might occur. Local policies will determine when and how consumers are to be evacuated from a bus. Bus evacuations must be practiced with the consumers.

Emergency response personnel must also be familiar with these policies, procedures and techniques.

Buses carry a variety of consumers varying in size, age and special needs. Make sure everyone is aware. Before conducting a evacuation drill, the driver should:

1. Obtain a copy of a step-by-step procedure which includes alternatives and special needs populations prepared by the proper agency authority.
2. Make sure that consumers have been instructed about what to do and how to proceed.
3. Identify which assistants have been instructed about what to do and how to proceed.
4. Contact administration and request parental permission, if applicable.

When to Evacuate

Evacuation is a very difficult situation. **The driver must consider the fact that the safest place for the consumers may be on the bus.** In an actual emergency, the decision to evacuate the bus is the initial step and one of the most important that the driver will have to make. That decision will initiate a chain of events to result in the safest possible situation for the passengers under the existing circumstances. The decision must be made as quickly as possible based on all the facts at hand.

A. Evacuate if there is any of the following indications that the bus is on fire or in danger of catching fire:

1. An open flame, smoke, hot tires or any other indication of possible fire on or under the bus.
2. An object in flames, or in danger of catching fire, that is close enough to an immobile bus to cause concern; or
3. A combustible material or fuel susceptible to fire that is leaking from an immobile bus or close enough to cause concern.

B. Evacuate the bus if it cannot be moved to a safe position and it is in

1. The path of other motor vehicles.
2. The path of a train or adjacent to any railroad tracks.
3. A position of inadequate visibility and in danger of being hit (in normal traffic conditions, the bus should be visible for a distance of 300 feet or more. A position over a hill or around a curve where such visibility does not exist should be considered reason for evacuation):
4. A dangerous position related to water or sudden, extreme drop:
5. The area of a hazardous spill for which there is need to quickly evacuate to an area upwind at least 300 feet from the incident; or
6. Any position that you feel puts the consumers in danger because of their presence on the bus.

C. Natural emergencies may require evacuation.

1. Try to pull the bus off the roadway away from large trees, electrical lines, telephone and utility poles, and buildings.
2. Should evacuation be necessary, move at least 100 feet away from the side of the bus, but do not cross the roadway unless absolutely necessary.
3. Determine the safest position for shelter from the emergency situation.
 - (a) Remain in the bus during a blizzard if conditions allow.
 - (b) Find a depression in the ground or an embankment away from the bus during a tornado.
 - (c) Locate consumers on highest ground possible during danger of flooding.