

Assessing the Need to Evacuate

Student safety and control is best maintained by keeping students on the bus during an emergency and/or impending crisis situation, if doing so does not expose them to unnecessary risk or injury. A decision to evacuate should include consideration of the following conditions:

1. Recognize the hazard. The decision to exit/evacuate the bus must be a timely one. Students in wheelchairs take a lot more time.
2. Is there a fire involved?
3. Is there a smell of raw or leaking fuel?
4. Is the bus likely to be hit by other vehicles?
5. Does the possibility exist that the bus will roll/tip causing further threat to safety?
6. Is the bus in direct path of a sighted tornado?
7. Has there been a major earthquake creating a dangerous environment?
8. Would removing students expose them to speeding traffic, severe weather, or a dangerous environment such as downed power lines?
9. Would moving pupils complicate injuries?
10. Is there a hazardous materials spill involved? It may be safer to remain on the bus and not come in contact with the material.

General Procedures to Follow for Emergency Evacuation

Keep the situation as orderly and low key as possible. If time and conditions permit, the bus driver should use the communication system to advise the dispatch office of the following:

1. The exact location, including the nearest intersecting road or familiar landmark.
2. The condition creating the emergency.
3. The type of assistance needed (police, fire, ambulance).
4. Notification that the bus is being evacuated.

Analyze conditions to determine the safest exit(s) from the bus.

During evacuation, monitor conditions and adjust procedures to meet unexpected circumstances. The driver may have to conduct the evacuation from outside the bus.

Move evacuated students to the nearest safe location at least 100 feet from the bus. The dispersal/regrouping area must be upwind of any fire situation.

After the decision to evacuate is made, take the first aid kit with you. If there is a radio or telephone in the school bus, put it out the drivers left window in case it is still operable. This allows additional information to be transmitted to the dispatcher or emergency center.

Be prepared to give information to emergency medical personnel regarding individual students' medical or physical requirements.

Each school bus driver should have:

1. A manifest with student names.
2. Knowledge of seating or seating chart.
3. Knowledge of individual student's abilities:
 1. Runners
 2. Helpers
 3. Those who will panic
 4. Those with special needs (mobility, communication, adaptive and assistive devices medications).
4. Assignments of students to seats:
 1. Use the "buddy" system. Those who can help seated by those who need help.
5. Develop plans to control students outside the bus:
 1. Hold hands.
 2. Sit down in a circle.
 3. Keep occupied until help arrives.

Instructions for Conducting Emergency Bus Evacuation Drills

There is an urgent need, due to the increased number of pupils being transported and the ever-increasing number of accidents on the highways, to instruct pupils on how to properly vacate a school bus in case of an emergency. It is possible for pupils to block the emergency door if all are trying to get out at the same time. There is also a possibility of danger when pupils jump from the rear emergency door exit. To avoid these situations, schools should organize and conduct emergency exit drills for all pupils who ride the school bus.

Reasons for Actual Emergency Evacuations

1. Fire or danger of fire. Being near an existing fire and unable to move the bus, or being near the presence of gasoline or other combustible material is considered dangerous and pupils should be evacuated. The bus should be stopped and evacuated immediately if the engine or any other portion of the bus is on fire. Pupils should be moved to a safe place 100 feet or more from the bus.
2. Unsafe position. When the bus is stopped because of an accident, mechanical failure, road conditions, or human failure, the driver must determine immediately whether it is safer for pupils to remain on the bus or to evacuate the bus.
3. Sight distance. 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. Mandatory evacuations. The driver must evacuate the bus when:
 1. The final stopping point is in the path of a train.
 2. The stopped position of the bus may change and increase danger (e.g. a bus comes to rest near a body of water or a precipice where it could still move and go into the water or over a cliff). The driver should be certain that the evacuation is carried out in a manner which affords maximum safety for the pupils.
 3. The stopped position of the bus is such that there is danger of collision.

A hazardous materials spill has occurred. There is a need to quickly evacuate to an area upwind at least 300 feet from the incident.