

FACT SHEET

Congress has directed the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to require school bus manufacturers to meet more stringent safety standards than apply to passenger vans and other buses. The following safety features have been built into school buses as a result of these stringent safety standards:

- Bus rollover protection which specifies the minimum structural strength of buses in rollover-type accidents;
- Bus body joint strength which specifies the minimum strength of the joints between panels that comprise the bus body and the body structure;
- Bus passenger seating and crash protection which establishes requirements for school bus seating systems for all sizes of school buses;
- Bus pedestrian safety devices which requires school buses to be equipped with an automatic stop signal arm on the left side of the bus to help alert motorists that they should stop their vehicles because children are boarding or leaving a stopped school bus; and school bus safety crossing arms which require students to walk at least eight feet in front of the school bus to cross a roadway;
- Bus amber and red flashing lights that precede and accompany the use of the stop arm;
- Bus mirror systems which provide school bus drivers with a full view of the front and sides of the school bus danger zone;
- Bus emergency exits (front, rear and side doors plus roof hatches); and
- Bus fuel system integrity.

ADDITIONAL FACTS

Why lap belts alone will not be effective in the current school bus configuration:

- Compartmentalization—the close spacing of seats and high padded seats;
- Use by children under the age of ten who may suffer severe internal injuries;
- Use by children over the age of ten who may suffer severe neck and back injuries;
- Retrofitting—consider warranties, federal and state regulations related to bus construction and how changes may affect liability;
- The loss of seating space on school buses; three seating spaces reduced to two; fewer seats;

- The differences in sizes of occupants and the types of restraint system used;
- Enforcement of seat-belt policies;
- Monitoring and supervision ensuring proper use of seat belts;
- Cost associated with the misuse of seat belts (vandalism, used as a weapon, etc.); and
- Cost of retrofitting by state mandate and having to redo after the results of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) two-year study and recommendations in FY 2001;

RECOMMENDED POSITION

It is the position of the state agencies involved in pupil transportation, in conjunction with the position taken by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation (NASDPT) and the National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT), that the current school bus safety standard related to compartmentalization remain the standard until such time as the NHTSA study determines its findings and makes recommendations as to the effectiveness of compartmentalization and/or lap/shoulder belt combinations in providing for the future safety of bus-riding students. Recommendations for future design standards of school buses will be based on scientific data and not the emotionalism of parents and others who advocate the installation and use of seat belts on school buses.