

The Wheels On the Bus

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Peterborough Fire/Rescue

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The commencement of school brings forth the memories of songs from my childhood, and as I see school buses on their early morning routes, the tune of the 'The Wheels on the Bus' is in the fore front of my mind. The lyrics are instrumental in familiarizing the youngest child with the overwhelming stimulation of public transportation, perhaps in an effort to minimize their fears about being a little person in a grand vehicle filled with many other occupants.

Yet on May 28, 2003 the joy from singing that song almost left me. I can still recall the catch in my breath when I heard Peterborough Fire/Rescue being toned out to the scene of a school bus vs. motor vehicle accident on Scott Mitchell Road. Four ambulances, two fire trucks and two police cruisers responded to the scene to ascertain the level of injury and to begin triage. As a result, seven juveniles secured with precautionary neck and back braces were transported to Monadnock Community Hospital. The incident ended on a positive note. With the exception of a few sprains and strains, cuts and bruises, everyone's injuries were determined to be non life-threatening.

School buses are on the roads again in full force. The early morning pick-ups and afternoon drop-off schedules are interspersed with late buses and sports teams going to and fro for competitions. Awareness is the key for all motorists, yet responsibility for the safety of a bus and its occupants remains on the shoulders of the bus driver, other motorists and the bus occupants themselves.

More often than not, deaths and injuries of bus passengers don't occur in a crash, rather, they occur when a passenger is entering or exiting a bus. For that reason, bus companies collaborate with schools in presenting safety drills on how to properly enter and exit a bus. To serve as a refresher for us older folks, I'll review some of their common sense safety suggestions that your children have heard throughout the years.

It is imperative that children have a safe place to wait for the bus, away from traffic and the street. As the bus approaches, children should wait for it to come to a complete stop before moving towards it and should be aware of the traffic around the bus since drivers of all other vehicles are required to stop when a bus is loading or unloading passengers, but unfortunately, not all do. Using the handrail when stepping onto the bus is helpful, especially when a child is laden with a heavy backpack as it prevents the child from tripping.

Once on the bus, the child needs to quickly find a seat and secure their belongings on their lap or under the seat. Backpacks in the aisle are a tripping hazard. In order to keep the bus driver from being distracted while driving, occupants of the bus are asked to behave considerately by refraining from rough-housing, and keeping arms and heads out of the windows.

When approaching their drop-off point, occupants are instructed to wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before getting up from their seats. Again, using the handrail on the way out prevents them from a crash landing in front of their peers.

If children have to cross the street after exiting the bus, they should walk at least ten feet ahead of the bus along the side of the road until they can turn around and see the driver clearly. They should wait for a signal from the driver that it is safe to cross and then proceed cautiously across the road, keeping an eye out for sudden traffic changes.

It all seems rather elementary, doesn't it? Yet as the months go by and everyone is in a comfortable routine, little guidelines have a habit of going to the wayside. Children may not always be careful, motor vehicle operators may at times be forgetful and the combination of the two can be fatal. It has happened in other communities. I don't want it to happen in ours. I only want for the wheels on the bus to go round and round, safely, all around the town.

Peterborough Fire/Rescue wishes for all motorists to be especially careful when school is in session and invites the public to call them at 1-603-924-8090 with any safety concerns. Visit our website at <http://www.firerescue.us>.