

## NTSB Releases Updated 'Most Wanted' Safety Recommendations for 2013

Written by Ryan Gray

Wednesday, 14 November 2012 12:16 - Last Updated Wednesday, 14 November 2012 13:49

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Several updated safety recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board could affect school buses and student transportation services, including the elimination of distracted driving, fire safety and motor vehicle collision avoidance technology.

[The NTSB announced its 2013 Most Wanted List](#) of transportation safety issues during a press conference on Wednesday at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The full list is below:

1. Improve Safety of Airport Surface Operations
2. Improve the Safety of Bus Operations
3. Eliminate Distraction in Transportation
4. Improve Fire Safety in Transportation
5. Improve General Aviation Safety
6. Preserve the Integrity of Transportation Infrastructure
7. Enhance Pipeline Safety
8. Implement Positive Train Control Systems
9. Eliminate Substance-Impaired Drivers
10. Mandate Motor Vehicle Collision Avoidance Technology

"Transportation is safer than ever, but with 35,000 annual fatalities and hundreds of thousands of injuries, we can, and must, do better," said NTSB Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman. "The Most Wanted List is a roadmap to improving safety for all of our nation's travelers," said NTSB Chairman Deborah Hersman, who holds a school bus endorsement on her personal CDL. "We're releasing the list now so it is available to policymakers at the state and federal levels as well

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as industry groups as they craft their priorities for 2013. We want to highlight the results of our investigations and ensure that safety has a seat at the table when decisions are made."

Hersman said one benefit of the Most Wanted List has been reductions in driver fatigue, seen with new hours-of-service rules, and another has been improved teen driver safety as each state has implemented some form of Graduated Drivers Licensing. Still, the nation sees some 35,000 fatalities and hundreds of thousands of injuries on roads and highways each year.

The NTSB removed school buses from the Most Wanted List in February 2010 after NHTSA published its updated final rule for FMVSS 222 to require three-point, lap/shoulder belts on small Type A school buses and to set standards for the voluntary installation of these same seat belt systems for larger school buses. As far as bus operations safety, NTSB mostly refers to motorcoaches, but industry representatives at NAAPT, NASDPTS and NSTA have said that could affect school buses.

Included on the NTSB's motorcoach safety Web page is a link to a letter dated Aug. 22, 1990 from then NTSB Chairman James Kolstad to then NHTSA Administrator Jerry Curry asking for a revision several Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards relating to school buses following the Sept. 21, 1989 crash of a school bus and a Coca-Cola Bottling Company delivery truck in Alton, Texas. Twenty-one of the 55 students on board died while trying to evacuate.

Distraction most often refers to the use of mobile communications behind the wheel, such as phone calls, texting, email and personal music players. Distraction was a major contributing factor to the August 2010 school bus pile-up crash near Gray Summit, Mo. But many in the school bus industry have told *School Transportation News* that distractions for bus drivers are most often caused by student passengers and are rarely addressed.

The school bus industry has also focused on identifying and improving fire safety challenges especially in engine compartments. Last month at the annual NASDPTS Conference held in Memphis, Tenn., Richard Willard, a NHTSA safety defects engineer in the Office of Defects Investigations, quoted figures from the National Fire Protection Association that an average of six bus fires occur each day, and the FMCSA said that there were 160 motorcoach fires per year for in 2004 through 2006. While there is only anecdotal evidence of school bus-specific fires from national news reports, they are also frequent. Willard said the most frequent point of origin of school bus fires aside from the engine turbochargers and alternators or from electrical systems are the brakes, tires and wheel or hub bearings.

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"One good thing about bus fires could be that we know a lot about them because there are so many," Willard said. "A lot of these fires are preventable."

He said NHTSA is specifically focusing on rear-brake overheating as well as parking brake self applications and pass-through power stud corrosion.

NTSB recommendations on eliminating substance-impaired drivers can also affect school bus driver alcohol and drug testing procedures, and a call for NHTSA to mandate motor vehicle collision avoidance technology may down the road include rulemaking that might affect school buses, but at an additional incremental cost.