



S.C. Department of Education
Office of Student Transportation
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Bulletin

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Topic:

High Winds and School Buses

Message:

Vehicle size, wind speed, wind direction, road conditions, and visibility must all be taken into consideration when making operational decisions during periods of inclement weather. Ultimately, the decisions must also be made at the local level because what is happening in one area may be completely different from conditions in an area just a short distance away. With that in mind, there are multiple factors to consider when operating buses in windy conditions, including:

- Wind forces of 30 MPH or greater can affect steering and control. This is especially true for sustained winds in excess of 30 MPH and/or wind gusts greater than 45 MPH.
- High winds can obscure visibility due to dust and debris blowing across the roadway. There is also a greater likelihood of trees falling into the roadway.
- High winds can affect stopping distance.
- Vehicles operating on elevated surfaces, such as bridges, overpasses, and causeways are more susceptible to the effects of wind because they are higher than the surrounding terrain. The same is true in mountainous areas.

Here are a few recommendations to consider:

1. Remind drivers of the hazards of operating vehicles during periods of high winds and wind gusts.
2. Limit the operation of school buses to periods where local sustained winds below 30 MPH or when local wind gusts are 45 MPH or less whenever possible. Consider current site-specific conditions and forecasts when making operational decisions.
3. If the National Weather Service issues a Wind Advisory or High Wind Warning, the winds associated with these conditions affect the safe operation of a school bus. The

operation of buses should be curtailed until conditions improve or the advisory/warning is lifted.

4. Severe Thunderstorm Warnings and Tornado Warnings are issued for conditions that are not safe for bus operations. When these warnings are in effect, bus drivers and transportation personnel should immediately refer to local school district safety procedures.
5. Always try to park buses in an open area and on level ground.
6. Close all windows, secure all doors, and in particular secure all roof hatches.

Please contact the Office of Student Transportation at 803-734-8244 if there are other questions regarding this matter.

Reference material:

The following definitions were taken from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather Service glossary, available at <http://w1.weather.gov/glossary/>:

High Wind Warning: A High Wind Warning means that high wind speeds of 40 mph or greater or gusts 58 mph or greater may pose a hazard or is life threatening. There is a greater likelihood of downed trees and driving can be dangerous for high profile vehicles.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: This is issued when either a severe thunderstorm is indicated by the WSR-88D radar or a spotter reports a thunderstorm producing hail one inch or larger in diameter and/or winds equal or exceed 58 miles an hour; therefore, people in the affected area should seek safe shelter immediately. Severe thunderstorms can produce tornadoes with little or no advance warning. Lightning frequency is not a criteria for issuing a severe thunderstorm warning. They can be issued without a Severe Thunderstorm Watch being already in effect. They are usually issued for a duration of one hour.

Tornado Warning: This is issued when a tornado is indicated by the WSR-88D radar or sighted by spotters; therefore, people in the affected area should seek safe shelter immediately. They can be issued without a Tornado Watch being already in effect. They are usually issued for a duration of around 30 minutes.

Wind Advisory: A Wind Advisory means that winds of 31-39 mph with higher gusts are expected. Winds this strong can make driving difficult, especially for high profile vehicles. Use extra caution.