

GMAC Insurance Cautions Drivers to Keep Their Distance from Stopped School Buses

by MarketWatch.com

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C., Oct 20, 2008 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- In honor of National School Bus Safety Week, Oct. 20 - 24, GMAC Insurance is urging drivers to do their part in keeping school bus transportation as safe as possible. The auto insurer is shining a spotlight on driving safely around school buses by revealing common misconceptions and offering safety tips for drivers, parents, and children.

The good news is many drivers understand basic school bus safety concepts. A recent GMAC Insurance survey of 5,524 licensed drivers shows 96 percent know to stop when approaching a school bus from either the front or the rear when the vehicle's red lights are flashing.

However, while many drivers know to stop, they are unsure about the exact stopping distance. The GMAC Insurance survey indicates only 30 percent of drivers know the correct stopping distance of 20 feet from a bus, which is key knowledge when it comes to safely providing ample room for children exiting the vehicle or crossing the street.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), school buses are one of the safest modes of transportation -- nearly eight times safer than passenger vehicles. However, other vehicles on the road may play a significant role in compromising that safety; NHTSA reports that nearly three-quarters of school bus fatalities occur when the child is getting on or off a bus versus when on the vehicle itself.

"It's up to every driver out there to take responsibility in keeping our children safe as they travel to and from school," said Wade Bontrager, vice president, marketing, GMAC Insurance. "It's important to us here at GMAC Insurance to promote school bus safety awareness, and as individuals, we should do all we can by making good driving decisions and following the rules of the road."

Ten Tips for School Bus Safety

For Drivers:

- Stay stopped. When a school bus stops and displays its red flashing lights, come to a stop until the lights are no longer flashing or until signaled to proceed by the bus driver or police officer.
- Keep back. The recommended distance drivers following a school bus should stop is at least 20 feet (or one and a half car lengths) from the back of the bus.
- Don't pass. It is illegal to pass on the right side of the bus, where children are loading and unloading. In many places, school bus drivers can report a passing vehicle.
- Be attentive. Children may run out into the street heading home or to the playground without realizing that there are drivers nearby.
- Go slow. Obey the posted speed limits in school zones where children are often walking or playing and pay attention to crossing guards.

For Parents and Children:

- See and be seen. Children should stay 10 feet away from the school bus and never go behind it. They should take five giant steps in front of the bus before crossing to ensure the driver can see them.
- Stay on the sidewalk. Make sure your children stay somewhere safe, like the sidewalk or in the driveway and out of the street, while waiting for the bus.
- Look before you leap. Teach your child how to cross the street safely. Practice looking left-right-left and make sure to check for turning vehicles, as well.
- Get an early start. As a general rule, children under 10 should always be supervised when crossing the street. Though children are typically unfit to handle tricky traffic scenarios until this age, you can help prepare your children by practicing safe traffic habits at a younger age.

-- Practice what you preach. Children learn by example, so the best way to teach them safe traffic habits is to follow them yourself.

Additionally, NHTSA offers a "Getting to School Safely Community Activities Guide" for kids promoting safe school bus habits that can be downloaded from the Web at www.nhtsa.dot.gov .

The GMAC Insurance survey was administered by TNS, a leading market information resource and the world's largest provider of custom research and analysis. The national sample was comprised of 5,524 licensed drivers in the United States, aged 16-60 . For more information about TNS, please visit www.tns-us.com .

For more information about GMAC Insurance and to find a local independent agent, call 877-468-3466 or visit www.gmacinsurance.com .

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