



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Just in Case: Safety Procedures to Live By

by Ira Allen

It's almost noon, and the sun streaming through the dispatch office windows is prompting you to take off for lunch. You pick up the ringing phone and somebody is already talking more quickly than you can follow. You are able to piece together a story: one of your buses has been in an accident on Elm Street; several windows have been shattered and the driver appears to be unconscious. The caller is unclear on how the accident happened and you can hear an ambulance arriving in the background. What do you do?

Fortunately, major transit accidents and emergencies are rare in Kansas. However, it is still important to have a plan for dealing with such situations calmly and effectively. Do you make sure that accidents and emergencies are dealt with appropriately, with minimal or no injury to passengers or drivers? Do you protect your agency and employees from fraudulent or excessive liability claims? Do your emergency procedures comply with regulatory requirements such as post-accident drug and alcohol testing? This article details a set of procedures you can use to handle an accident or other emergency situation with confidence.

Plan ahead, in writing

It is important that you establish a written set of agency policies and procedures for on-board emergencies and accidents. Procedures should address a variety of situations, especially vehicle accidents, on-board emergencies such as passenger illness

or violence, foul weather, and natural disasters such as flooded roads, tornados and blizzards.

The initial responsibility for crisis management on a bus rests with the driver of the vehicle, assuming that the driver is not incapacitated. A suggested set of procedures for drivers to follow in any situation is described in the sidebar. While these procedures will be valuable, you will need to come up with your own, more detailed guidelines. Use these

Program Coordinator for KDOT, suggests laminating an emergency card and posting it in the vehicle. That way, in the event the driver is incapacitated in an accident, passengers have "something in the vehicle to tell them who to call." Passengers are accustomed to the presence of safety cards in the seat pockets on planes; perhaps it is time to see them more frequently on buses, although the driver need not run through a safety presentation at every stop.



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procedures as a starting point, and tailor them to best fit your agency, giving particular attention to the types of incidents your agency is most likely to encounter. Establishing procedures will be worthless, however, if your staff and riders don't know about them.

Communicate your procedures to staff and riders

There are several ways to communicate your procedures to staff and riders. Your efforts will probably center on two areas—written policies and training. A checklist for passengers to read on board can be helpful. Kathy Marion,

OCCK, Inc. in Salina, KS, for instance, distributes passenger handbooks regularly, which offer information on safety procedures among other things. A card with instructions on the operation of a two-way radio may be posted near the radio. This may not apply in all cases, of course, as some providers carry passengers who would have difficulty following these instructions.

Reinforce the procedures

Because the driver is the most important safety resource on the bus, driver safety education and orientation should be a priority for transit

providers. Some steps toward this end include regular safety drills, instructional handbooks, and mandatory driver training. Gary Rohr, of OCCK, says, "Once a month drivers time the length it takes to get passengers off the bus and accounted for," as in the event of an engine fire or tornado. OCCK also mandates 21 hours of driver safety training, as well as a commercial driver's license.

An employee achievement recognition program can be a positive reinforcement for drivers who are safety-conscious. The National Safety Council can, for a minimal fee, provide you with a safe driver award kit including certificates, patches, pins, and other items. Placing a high priority on driver awareness of emergency procedures—including evacuation procedures, first aid, CPR, and other technical skills—can save lives, and can also help to protect your agency from fallout in the aftermath of a vehicular accident.

Consider holding monthly or bi-monthly safety meetings with all staff and volunteers to make sure everyone is "thinking safety." This is one of the best ways to ensure you and your staff have the time to formally discuss safety practices and experiences. Procedures should be reinforced on an ongoing basis. Emergencies are generally infrequent, so it is not enough to offer training only once. Safety meetings are an ideal way to reinforce the content and importance of your agency's safety procedures.

If your agency requires post-accident drug and alcohol testing, it is useful to have a flow sheet to help determine when such testing is necessary, and what level of testing is appropriate. OCCK Inc. has developed such a flow sheet to help them coordinate their agency's drug and alcohol testing guidelines with requirements imposed by KDOT.

You may also want to consider dispatcher training. One of the first actions a driver takes in an emergency is to contact the dispatcher. It is important that the dispatcher have the correct information, and it's very helpful if s/he also has some measure of hands-on experience with the driver's emergency procedures. The dispatcher

Four Step Crisis Plan for Drivers

If you are involved in an emergency, you should follow procedures defined by your transit agency. These procedures are designed to create agency-wide consistency in handling incidents and they help maintain a high safety standard. They also decrease the risk of injury and liability. We recommend four basic steps for drivers to follow:

- **Keep calm.** This is your first responsibility in any crisis. You must be able to make rational and informed decisions, as these decisions will affect the safety of everyone on the bus. When you stay calm, even if frightened yourself, passengers and others around you tend to remain calm as well. Staying calm helps everyone handle an accident or emergency in a professional and responsible manner.
- **Contact the dispatcher.** Your dispatcher plays a critical role in providing guidance, support, and instructions during an emergency. He or she can also contact the police or hospital if necessary. Contact with the dispatcher allows the agency to send supporting personnel to the emergency location if they are required, and keeps the agency abreast of the situation as it unfolds. It is important to stay in contact; this helps the agency provide as much assistance as is needed. Obviously, if your vehicle is not equipped with on-board communication, alternate policies should be adopted.
- **Protect your passengers, yourself, and the vehicle.** This means doing whatever is necessary to guard against injury, discomfort, and further damage, and is primarily up to your judgment. You must remain aware of circumstances around you, and be sure that passengers are in a safe location and do not wander into danger. Distribute witness cards if required. In certain types of emergencies, steps 2 and 3 listed here may be switched in priority. For example, if your bus has an engine fire, you should ensure the safety of your passengers and yourself before contacting the dispatcher.
- **Complete the required reports.** It's important to complete reports concerning accidents, emergencies, and incidents before you leave work on the day of one of these situations. This is because memory will not be sufficient if an accident goes to court and you are called to the witness stand. Your written reports will be used by those who weren't there and do not know what happened; it is to your advantage that they get an accurate account of what transpired.

should be able to visualize the actions being taken by the driver. For this to be possible, training is essential.

Talking with the media

Even if everything is handled appropriately, talking with the media or other agencies needs to be carefully considered. Be prepared to communicate with a number of groups and individuals during or shortly after a crisis situation. Plan in advance who in your agency will have authority to speak publicly about the accident or incident. For obvious reasons, you will probably not want the driver to talk to the media. This should be made clear to drivers in training sessions and safety meetings.

Community Transportation Online has an article concerning media-relations that may be a useful resource; this can be found at www.cta.org/ct/mayjune99/press.html.

There are a number of ways to enhance safety awareness and skills within an agency, and several of them have been outlined in this article. If you wish to do more for safety at your agency, consider safety enhancement training programs by such organizations as the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). You can check for more information at www.ctaa.org/training/pass and www.apta.com. The Kansas Department of Transportation

(KDOT) has information on safety. Their website can be found at www.ink.org/public/kdot/. Janet Blue, KDOT Drug and Alcohol Testing Program Coordinator, can be contacted at (785) 296-0826.

Safety awareness is one of the greatest responsibilities of transit providers, and in this case, a good defense is the best offense. Although everyone hopes that their fleet will escape accidents and emergencies, serious mishap can befall even the most careful drivers. Because of this, it is vital that you have procedures for dealing with emergencies, and that these procedures are familiar to your drivers, and hopefully your passengers as well. Only you know if your standards are up to scratch. Only you can make the changes necessary to ensure safety for your passengers, drivers, and other employees. Because of this, it's vital that you do your best to be prepared, just in case.

Sources:

Risk Management for Rural Transit Systems Resource Handbook, U.S. DOT, FTA, RTAP National Program, 1993;

SCDHPT Public Transportation Vehicle Operator Safety Manual and Resource Guide, published by the South Carolina Department of Health and Public Transportation, 1988.

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