



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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

Steps to Take in Deciding to Evacuate Your Vehicle

By Anne Lowder and Pat Weaver

Making the decision to evacuate a vehicle is something you hope you never have to do as a rural transit driver. However, planning in advance about when, where and how you would do it is important to operating a safe transit system. In our last issue, (July 2014) we announced the availability of hands-on training for conducting vehicle evacuations. Here are some of the basics for transit drivers to use in making a decision to evacuate in an emergency.

It's not just about walking off the bus

There are some important decisions to be made before evacuating, but all those decisions must be made in just a few seconds. Discuss these potential circumstances with agency staff in advance, and then practice the necessary steps. Every situation is different, so ultimately it's up to the driver to quickly make the best possible decisions, and then act.

Steps to an evacuation decision

Let's look at the following steps of an emergency evacuation of a transit vehicle and consider some details:

Step One: Assess the risk. In this first step, the driver is quickly assessing the situation to determine whether evacuation is the best choice, or whether it's safer to stay on the vehicle. Factors such as smoke, fire or water submersion are going to require evacuation; you and your passengers probably are going to be safer off the

doubt, call 911 first to get help on its way as quickly as possible. Of course, there may be circumstances (like a vehicle breakdown) that do not require emergency response, but do require a response from your agency. Practice scenarios with your drivers so that they are absolutely clear about who they should call in each type of emergency, and ensure that they have the tools to do so. (Does everyone have a phone? How about radios?)

Incidentally, if you are a driver making a 911 call, always start by giving your name and location. Then provide a description of the problem and additional details as you have time. In a role-playing exercise as part of our RTAP emergency evacuation workshop, most drivers start reporting the problem (crash and injuries) and then state

the location. The problem is, you could be halfway through your description and lose contact with 911/dispatch, having never given your location.

Consider working with your local emergency response agencies in advance to provide them with a contact name and number for your agency to alert if an emergency call comes in from



Emergency Evacuation Training at Potawatomi Nations, Holton, KS.

bus. In circumstances like a crash in which there is no fire, you might determine that it is safest to keep everyone on the bus until help arrives, particularly if evacuating would put passengers in danger from other traffic.

Step Two: Call for help. The driver next determines whether to call to 911 or call dispatch. When in

a driver. Phone numbers on the side of your vehicle (including area code) can also help first responders connect with your agency.

Step Three: Rapidly evacuate.

If the decision is to evacuate, it is essential to do so as quickly as possible, without panicking. Rural transit drivers, we find, generally know their passengers, and know some of them need more assistance than others. Some passengers may be able to assist others. The driver, while assisting passengers to evacuate, also needs to direct those who are ambulatory to help with the evacuation and to assist others.

What if the driver and helpers cannot evacuate everyone? You, as a driver, need to stay as calm as possible and give clear, firm instructions as you're assisting to help get as many people off as you can, including yourself. You've made the call for help, and first responders are on the way; they may need to finish the evacuation.

Step Four: Stay together. The driver's announcement to evacuate the vehicle needs to include the path for evacuation (which door, hatch or window) and then where to rally after the evacuation. For example: "Folks, we need to evacuate this vehicle because I suspect a fire. We will be using the rear exit. John and Sue, I need your assistance in helping people out the back door. Please stay together, and move as far away from the vehicle and the road as possible."

Step Five: Help the injured.

Helping the injured usually involves preventing or slowing shock symptoms. Symptoms of shock include rapid, shallow breathing, cold, clammy skin, rapid, weak pulse, dizziness,

bluish lips/ fingernails and sweating. Treatment includes laying the person down (if possible) and elevating the feet about 12 inches above the head unless you suspect leg, hips, back or neck injury. Cover and keep them warm. Finally, be prepared to turn the person on their side if they vomit.

Step Six: Re-assess the situation.

You have completed steps One through Five. Now re-assess. Let's say your current situation is that everyone is together, away from the vehicle. The most important thing is to remain calm and in control of the situation. You have let your passengers know that you called 911 and help is on the way. Continue to re-evaluate the condition of the injured and, if possible, call 911 again to get an update on estimated time of arrival for the first responders.

In summary, conducting emergency exercises is very important. The exercises increase skills and instill confidence in your drivers' ability to cope in an emergency. It has been shown that transit agencies that conduct emergency exercises are better prepared to respond to emergencies. Emergency exercises also enhance external and internal communication by developing best practices for your agency and community.

Conclusion

Every emergency situation is different, and no one response fits all circumstances. The best way to prepare is to work out scenarios of possible risks, and then role-play and discuss a response for each scenario with your drivers. Emergency exercises are an activity that should be integrated into your drivers' training on a regular

basis. Evacuation exercises need to be routinely created, practiced, evaluated, and revised.

We encourage you to discuss hosting an emergency evacuation training at your Coordinated Transit District meeting. Decide which transit agency would like to host the training (provide the meeting room, buses and parking lot) then call Anne at Kansas RTAP at (785) 864-1469. We'll work on scheduling a training session for 2015 (March through November). While we won't drive your bus into running water to teach you safe evacuation, we will use transit vehicles, equipment, and people to get you more comfortable with the evacuation process.

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Source

- TCRP Synthesis 160: Paratransit Emergency Preparedness and Operations Handbook. 2013.