



SEPTEMBER 2022

BACK STEP TALKS

School Safety Considerations

Thinking School Safety

September is the time of year that school systems across the state are returning to full time classes. As emergency responders, we need to be aware of the potential impact on our response needs as school sessions begin. Changes in traffic patterns, both vehicle and pedestrian, are around us and may impact our response routes. What happens when a school bus filled with children becomes involved in an accident? And, what if we are alerted to a response at the school, for either a medical or fire emergency? How well prepared are we to respond to these incidents? This month's Back Step Talks is dedicated to addressing some of these challenges that emergency responders may encounter during school session.

June 14, 2022, started just like any other day for a group of Anne Arundel County middle school

students. As the school year was nearing the end, all the children could think of was getting ready for summer vacation. All of that changed in a flash when the school bus they were riding in was involved in an accident. The school bus was

occupants were treated and released at the hospital the same day. But incidents such as this occur all too frequently, and as first responders we must prepare and train for these types of emergencies.



involved in a motor vehicle collision on Route 198, sending several students and the bus driver to a hospital (four students, the bus driver, and bus aide) and one occupant from one of the other vehicles involved. The bus was carrying 23 passengers. It occurred about 3:15pm. Two other vehicles were involved. The bus went off the road and crashed into a tree. Anne Arundel County Fire Department was quick to respond and brought in additional resources, including their Medical Ambulance Bus (MAB), in case the injuries were determined to be much worse. Fortunately, none of the injuries were serious and all

Speaking of going back to school, now is a good time to assess your own training needs. Have you looked at the fall schedule of classes at MFRI? What classes do you need to be ready for your next position in the department? What about beyond MFRI? The National Fire Academy is right in our backyard, yet

Maryland responders take very little advantage of the training opportunities. And what about college programs? Maryland has some of the best college programs to advance your emergency services career. Many career departments are beginning to require college degrees for advancement into officer positions. There are scholarship programs to help offset the costs of college. Training for the emergency services doesn't stop at recruit school. It is a career responsibility: to be the best that you can be and to continue learning as the world changes around you.

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To Pass Or Not To Pass

Maryland Law requires ALL vehicles to stop for school buses with flashing red lights activated and stop-signs extended. This includes emergency vehicles. Emergency Lights and Sirens activated does not give the emergency vehicle authority to pass a stopped school bus. Best practice is to turn off siren and wait for the bus driver to complete the loading/discharge process. Then after they have deactivated the buses Red Lights and retracted the Stop-Signs the emergency vehicle may proceed. Use extreme caution to look for any children that may have discharged from the bus, they may be distracted and not aware of your presence.

Annotated Code of Maryland §21-706.

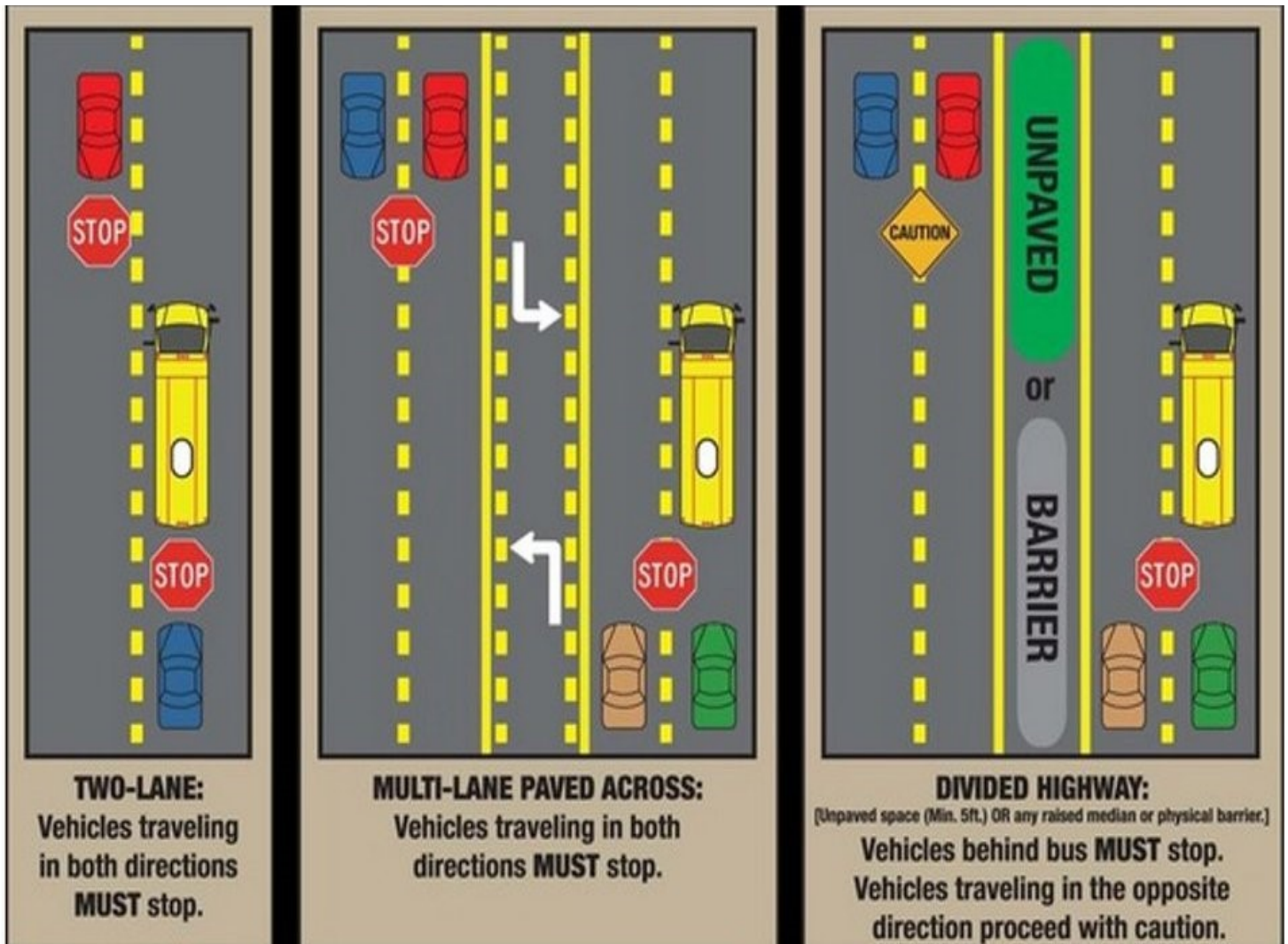
(a) If a school vehicle has stopped on a roadway and is operating the alternately flashing red lights specified in § 22-228 of this article, the driver of any other vehicle meeting or overtaking the school vehicle shall stop at least 20 feet from the rear of the school vehicle, if approaching the school vehicle from its rear, or at least 20 feet from the front of the school vehicle, if approaching the school vehicle from its front.

(b) If a school vehicle has stopped on a roadway and is operating the alternately flashing red lights specified in § 22-228 of this article, the driver of any other

vehicle meeting or overtaking the school vehicle may not proceed until the school vehicle resumes motion or the alternately flashing red lights are deactivated.

(c) This section does not apply to the driver of a vehicle on a divided highway, if the school vehicle is on a different roadway.

The decision to pass a stopped school bus may end your career, and worse it may be something you will have to live with for the rest of your life if you hit and kill a child.



Fear of a School Bus Accident

The first thing responders need to know is that buses are built to federal, state and local standards and have not changed a lot over the years. School buses are designed to take impacts while protecting passengers. Some of this is completed by the high profile, seating compartment design and general construction over kill.

According to the NHTSA data bus accidents have increased over the years with nearly, 60,000 in the U.S. annually. This figure is all bus categories, but the incidents are less deadly with injuries and deaths staying about the same. What has increased was property damage cost.

Some things to think about when responding to a bus incident.

1. The bus driver is responsible person on site and will have the most information. They have contact with the school, and the 911 center and have that vital information that incident commanders will need enroute and on arrival. Examples of this are number of patients, injuries, is fire involved. These answers could trigger the call for additional resources such as a Mass Casualty Incident response.

2. Plan on a establishing a Unified Command no matter how small. The players encountered are EMS, Fire, Law Enforcement, District School Representatives. All of the players have roles which have legal

impacts if policies are not followed for a positive smooth outcome. The District School Representatives are the responsible party for the children on buses and have strict guidelines which are to be followed. As an EMS/FIRE agency being aware of the school district requirements and having drills will make operations run smoother.

3. Is your agency trained in heavy rescue, mass casualty incidents, command and control. Understanding of Bus tactics as the rescue corridor which refers to the movement of responders and equipment in one way and the removal of all patients out another way is a key example.

4. Special considerations are additional buses to maintain

accountability of uninjured children or to keep children out of the weather, is the bus full of children with mental disabilities with an aide who may have been injured, is this a hybrid bus bringing a totally new dimension to the challenge at hand.

There are many educational seminars regarding heavy extrication given across the regions and at national conferences. Some are practical and some are classroom. Education on Hybrid/Electric or Hybrid/Gas buses bring a new challenge with additional types of fuel loads and weight in some cases to the bus. We as responders owe it to the customer to be prepared for this as referred as the **WOW** incident. Get the training ahead of time not when on an actual incident happens.



Above: This November 2016 accident involved an school bus and commuter bus. Six people were killed and 10 injured. Bus accidents can quickly tax your resources.

Evacuate, Shelter, Lockdown Where are the Students?

When you are dispatched to the scene of an emergency incident at a local school, whether it be a report of fire, a medical emergency, or an active shooter incident, part of what must go through your size-up process as you respond is trying to understand where will the students be? Has the school issued an evacuation order? Have they ordered some part or all the school to shelter in place? Or is the school in a total lockdown due to an imminent threat to the students and faculty?

The decision to evacuate, shelter, or lockdown the school is a decision that will likely be made by the school staff prior to your arrival. It is a very important decision to be made by any staff member when faced with an emergency situation at one of our schools. If there were an incident in a school, each staff member has been taught to determine the best course of action to take. Options available include:

Evacuate – Often there are two types of evacuation: a fire evacuation and a directed evacuation. For a fire evacuation, school personnel are directed to activate the fire evacuation alarm and leave the building by the nearest exit. A directed evacuation may be in response to a specific situation such as a hazardous materials release, a suspicious package, or other threat. The plan of action will be to direct

everyone away from the known danger area and evacuate to a safe area. The area of exit may not be the closest exit due to the danger of the incident.

Shelter – Sheltering is used to hold all students in a safe place without evacuating the school. This may be used in the event of severe weather, an outside hazardous materials release, or any other condition outside the school where it has been determined to be safer to stay inside the school. A shelter in place is preferred over a lockdown because instruction continues, and students are not impacted emotionally or educationally by the decision. When a shelter in place is implemented, teachers take student and staff attendance, restrict movement in the hallways unless there is adult supervision, and continue to teach.

Lockdown – A lockdown is implemented when there is an imminent threat to the safety of students and staff on school property. When staff members hear an announcement to go into a lockdown they lock their doors, shut all window and door blinds, turn off the lights, go to their pre-determined safe corner, remain silent, and wait for further instructions.

These are important considerations, and it is important to discuss the

procedures with your local school system so that you understand their actions. An important consideration for fire and EMS responders is whether you have sufficient resources coming to help direct an evacuation or shelter in place. While the school personnel have the primary responsibility for the safety of students and faculty, your job may require you to assist due to the large number of persons at risk. At the same time, you still need resources to manage the incident (fire, EMS, Hazmat). Are you prepared for all of these added responsibilities. Preplan activities must include the assessment of resources needed and how to get them to the scene in a timely manner. Luckily, all of our school systems are prepared for these types of emergencies and conduct routine drills and exercises so that students and faculty are prepared to act in the event of the emergency. The local fire and EMS organizations should participate in these exercises so that they are also prepared to act. Planning, training, and exercises are key to a successful outcome for these types of incidents. Although these types of incidents don't happen frequently, don't put these actions aside. The success of the incident relies on your preparedness to respond and act in a coordinated manner.

LOCKDOWN

WITH OPTIONS

The location and seriousness of an active assailant threat, will inform students and staff on whether to **AVOID, DENY, or DEFEND**.

- AVOID** — If safe and practicable to do so, **AVOID** the area by quickly and quietly moving/fleeing as far away from the threat as possible.
- DENY** — When you cannot safely **AVOID**, or it is impossible to do so, lock and barricade your room to **DENY** access to an assailant, **following Lockdown procedures**.
- DEFEND** — As a last resort, act by yourself or, with age-appropriate students, to **DEFEND** yourself from an assailant.

Situational Awareness—taking in the details of your surroundings, so you can adapt and respond to challenging situations in a safe manner if and when they arise.

Safe Corner—Areas in classrooms where students and teachers would not be visible from hallways, windows or door openings.

High Risk Zone—Refers to areas such as stairwells, hallways and doorways that are generally narrow, confining areas that offer little or no cover or concealment.

Protective Assets—Available furniture such as desks, chairs, file cabinets, tables, that can be placed against a door to block, or **DENY**, entry to an office or classroom.

Principals, or their designee, can call for a school-wide Lockdown if the situation requires one.

Know Your Schools—Preplanning Your Response

Responding to a school facility incident comes with unique hazards based on whether it is an elementary school or a high school. These hazards can be based on the student population ages, the time of day, large events, and the campus layout. Pre-planning your response to each school will be beneficial to both your crew and the school population. This pre-planning should include response to EMS calls, fire calls, and mass casualty/active shooter calls. Your Department should be able to pre-plan for the first two types of responses, but you should team up with law enforcement, and surrounding agencies to plan for the mass casualty/active shooter response.

It's highly recommended you work closely with each of your school's

administrative staff and the school resource officer when pre-planning for the different type of incidents that may occur. Determining where responding units should enter the campus, where to enter the building (front door/north side door/etc.), and who will meet/guide responders (coach/teacher/admin staff/etc.) will minimize the disruption to the student population.

The type of events being held at the school (basketball games/football games/prom dance/etc.) should also be considered as additional resources may be required to assist with the call. When pre-planning for each of your school campuses determine the following:

- Administrative Office location
- Nurse's office location
- Cafeteria and gym entrance and exits
- Back hallways and other areas not accessible by the student population
- Elevator location and closest ground entrance
- Stairwells
- Helicopter landing zone
- Knox box location
- Alarm panel location

Planning for school incidents will ensure you are prepared to respond to and manage incidents unique to these facilities.

School Bus Extrication Considerations

Quite often, the discussion of rescue tactics and techniques moves to a discussion of how new automobile designs have complicated extrication. But now let's move that discussion to the complications of school bus rescue and extrication.

As you arrive on the scene of a school bus accident, one of your first considerations should be for the safety of the passengers and how to best access them. Fortunately, school bus design has advanced with many safety features that help facilitate access to the passenger area. School students are taught during exit drills on how to use these features and may have already started to self-extricate upon your arrival.

But what if these manufactured openings have become damaged, obstructed, or if the bus is in a position (on the side or overturned) where these openings cannot be used? It's time to get out the big toolbox and you may end up needing every tool in the toolbox.

One of the most useful tools in the toolbox is a reciprocating saw. This can be used to quickly cut through the sidewalls or roof of the bus. These can be put in service quickly

without the need to extended setup time. Blade choice is an important factor when using the saw and you should make sure that you have sufficient blades that are in good condition and not ones that have been used many times over. Other tools, such as hydraulic tools, air chisels, cribbing, airbags, chains, hand tools, and ladders may be needed to successfully perform the necessary extrication or the bus passengers.

How will you know which tools to use? As fire and rescue personnel, we must constantly train to learn new skills and refine the ones that we have previously learned. Know what types of school busses are used in your area. Seek out old buses that have been junked and arrange to make one available for a company drill to learn more about what extrication techniques work best with the tools that you have. We often say, "Make every day a training day" and school bus extrication is an area that many of us never have the opportunity to train on. We can't be learning when the accident happens. Train now, using the tools in your toolbox, so that when an incident occurs, you will be prepared.

Resources



[Back Step Talks
Back Issues](#)

[Maryland
Fire Chiefs](#)



[MD Public Schools
Emergency Planning
Guidelines](#)

[Montgomery Co.
Crisis Preparedness](#)



[FEMA Sample School
Emergency Plan](#)

[School Safety
Resources](#)



[DHS Active Shooter
Guidance](#)

70

The number of fallen
firefighters through
August 31, 2022.

US Fire Administration



[Frederick Co. LODD
Report](#)

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE