

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SAFETY ENGINEERS NORTH FLORIDA CHAPTER

NOVEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

School Busses and '65 Mustangs

A few years, back I was fortunate enough to be able to purchase one of my dream cars – a 1965 Mustang fastback. It came without seat belts as in 1965 they were not mandatory factory equipment; and through the subsequent years of this beautiful car's existence, no one was inclined to install them. The same applied to school busses in 1965; they came without seat belts. Today, modern Mustangs have seat belts, shoulder harnesses, air bags, etc. However, school busses still are, in most cases, not factory equipped with any restraint devices for their passengers.

As explained in a summary document for a \$1.4 million University of Alabama study, the installation of school bus seat belts is an emotional and heated issue because the lives of small children are at risk. And despite the strong safety record of school busses, there is disagreement about whether or not seat belts are the best way to protect traveling school children. One school of thought promotes the idea that the introduction of seat belts will help save lives and prevent injuries. However, another school of thought

does not see a justifiable reason for going beyond the current safety requirements and practices for school busses.

According to the NHTSA's web site, seat belts have been required on passenger cars in the U. S. since 1968. And forty-nine states plus the District of Columbia have laws in place requiring their use. However, according to the NHTSA, "School buses are different by design and use a different kind of safety restraint system that works extremely well." The NHTSA goes on to say that "Large school buses are heavier and distribute crash forces differently than do passenger cars and light trucks. Because of these differences, the crash forces experienced by occupants of buses are much less than that experienced by occupants of passenger cars, light trucks or vans. NHTSA decided that the best way to provide crash protection to passengers of large school buses is through a concept called compartmentalization. This requires that the interior of large buses provide occupant protection such that children are protected without the need to buckle-up. Through compartmentalization, occupant crash protection is provided by a protective envelope consisting of

strong, closely-spaced seats that have energy-absorbing seat backs."

The NHTSA estimates the rate of death from school bus accidents to be almost 7 times less than that of passenger cars and light trucks. Obviously, it is pretty hard to argue with these statistics, presuming that they are accurate. Additionally, according to the NHTSA, more children die from injuries sustained from being struck by school busses than die from injuries sustained while riding in a school bus involved in an accident.

To back up a bit for the sake of clarification, seat belts are required by the NHTSA to be on some school busses – the ones weighing under 10,000 pounds. But these busses make up only twenty percent of all school busses in use. Additionally, according to a government web site, some states, to include California, Florida, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, and Texas have some sort of school bus safety belt requirements. For example, Title XXIII, Chapter 316, Section 6145 of the 2015 Florida Statutes requires new school buses purchased on and after January 1, 2001 to be equipped with seat belts or another federally-approved

restraint system and also requires each school bus passenger to wear a properly adjusted belt when the bus is operating. However, this only applies to school busses that are used exclusively for the transportation of public school students.

So if you believe that the formula for kinetic energy applies to school busses as well as it does to passenger automobiles, and you support seat belts in school busses, you are in luck. In a recent presentation given to the National Association for Pupil Transportation, Mark Rosekind, the new leader of NHTSA, gave the impression that there is a new sheriff in town and things are going to change. Mr. Rosekind's statements are as follows. "As NHTSA's administrator, my primary role is as the leader of our agency. NHTSA has not always spoken with a clear voice on the issue of seat belts on school buses. So let me clear up any ambiguity now: The position of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is that seat belts save lives. That is true whether in a passenger car or in a big yellow bus. And saving lives is what we are about. So NHTSA's policy is that every child on every school bus should have a three-point seat belt. NHTSA will seek to use all the tools at our disposal to help achieve that goal, and today I want to launch a nationwide effort to get us there."

While this is good news for safety advocates that support

this issue, it will not be an easy sell. Data already suggest that school busses are a relatively safe mode of transportation and that very few injuries occur on them. Additionally, the cost of a new school bus that is equipped with safety belts/harnesses is reported to be from \$7,000 to \$10,000 higher; a bus without belts costs from \$80,000 to \$100,000. Additionally, it has been estimated to cost from \$20,000 to \$23,000 to retrofit a school bus with safety belts.

In the end, it is obviously much easier to put safety belts into an antique car than a 15,000 pound, 70-passenger school bus. But at least concerned voices are now being heard on this issue.

Bob Dooley

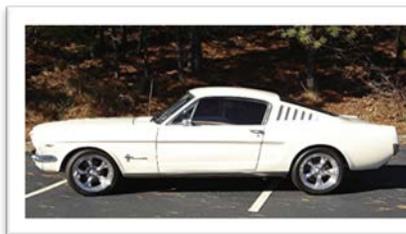


Photo source:

<http://www.motortopia.com/cars/1965-ford-mustang-9561>



Photo Source :

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/school-bus-surveillance-camera-captures-driver-walking-off/story?id=28920267>

Article Sources and Hyperlinks of Interest

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<http://uanews.ua.edu/2010/07/uas-utca-finalizing-research-data-on-school-bus-seat-belt-pilot-study/>

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http://www.dailyprogress.com/starexponent/nhtsa-administrator-recommends-seat-belts-on-school-buses/article_14af89b2-8be7-11e5-9372-93ee7ae62d44.html

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Speeches,+Press+Events+&+Testimonies/mr-napt-11082015>

Next ASSE Local Chapter Meeting

Our next membership meeting will be held at the Northeast Florida Safety Council on November 18th at 11:30 a.m. Please RSVP to Steve Wilson at steven_wilson1@me.com.

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