

School bus safety is everyone's responsibility. And if we drive or own a car, that responsibility increases.

To be sure, there are numerous laws governing motorist behavior in every state. Here in California, for instance, the state recently adopted the Federal Commercial Driver's License Requirement. The law affects all commercial driver's, including school bus drivers.

And you thought school bus safety began and ended with whether or not school buses were equipped with seat belts. Wrong.

You see, to obtain a driver's license motorists are required to become knowledgeable about a variety of subjects, among them school bus safety. Unfortunately, school bus safety laws are complicated. For example, motor vehicle laws in every state require motorists to stop behind school buses with their red lights flashing. However, if the school bus is on the other side of a divided highway, that is a road with a center median – meaning at least two or more lanes of travel in either direction – motorists do not need to stop. But if there is no center median on a multilane highway, you must stop from either direction until the red lights stop flashing. Complicated!

Meanwhile, school bus drivers are required to activate their flashing red lights when loading or unloading children. In California, alone of all states, school bus drivers not only activate the red lights but must personally escort the child across the road.

Yet, we often hear of and see motorists treating a stopped, yellow school bus with red lights flashing as a stop sign. They stop, and then they go -- around the school bus! Bear in mind, if you fail to remain stopped, judges may fine you up to \$1,000 and your driving privilege could be suspended for one year!

A little background will make the magnitude of this issue apparent.

Did you know about 25 million school age children ride the school bus twice daily to and from school, about 50 million rides? Multiply that number times the average of 180 school days in states across the U.S., and that number becomes nine billion! So, there are nine billion rides to and from school in an average school year. Meanwhile, there are approximately 12,000 school districts in the U.S. and about 500,000 yellow school buses on the road. Bear in mind, these school-related numbers are pre-Covid pandemic. Oh, and lest we forget, in 2020, there were at least 228 million licensed motorists and 136 million cars in the United States.

The vast majority of school children travel safely. Still, an average of 10 to 20 school children are killed annually due to all kinds of school bus accidents. Admittedly, 10 to 20 is an infinitesimal number when compared to ten billion student rides, but if one of those children is yours, or you are the motorist responsible for a school bus fatality, it is 100 percent. You'll live with that the rest of your life! And that is the responsibility each of us carries with us when we get behind the wheel of a car.

So, pay attention to school bus safety. Remember, it is an inherent responsibility with your driver's license.