To:

Transportation Supervisors
Secretary-Treasurers
Superintendents

New School Buses and School Bus Safety

If you compare today’s school bus with a 1980 model, you will notice that significant changes have occurred over the years. While the vehicle itself is still yellow and black, a number of components have been added or changed. The introduction of diesel engines in school buses in the early nineties was probably the most dramatic change in school bus history. Then came the electronic diesel engine with electrical wiring under the engine valve cover, and sensors to feed information to the ECM. Wow!! School buses had entered the computer age! Air ride suspensions, automatic transmissions, air ride driver’s seats, flat floor features, crossing arms, strobe lights, video cameras. The school bus has evolved from a bouncing bucket of bolts into a safer and more comfortable student transportation vehicle.

We know the equipment has improved and that today’s school buses are safer vehicles. However, school bus safety is ultimately in the hands of the school bus driver. These individuals should be recognized for their exceptional contribution to school bus safety. Please take the time to thank them for a job "well done".
International
School Bus Chassis
- ABS Recall -

In November 2002, International Trucks issued a recall on anti-lock brake systems (ABS). Meetings were held in Dauphin, Brandon, and Winnipeg to advise school bus maintenance personnel on the requirements of the recall. Al Grassing of International Trucks attended the meetings at all three locations to provide clarification and answer questions regarding the recall.

In addition, a "Diamondlife Disc Brakes" training video was distributed to all school divisions in attendance. It is anticipated that all school divisions have performed the prescribed ABS inspection and component adjustments identified in the recall notice.

It should be noted that in order to meet Manitoba vehicle inspection standards, anti-lock brake systems cannot be disconnected in a school bus vehicle. Only the chassis manufacturer has the authority to instruct the end user to disconnect a particular system in a chassis. The original equipment manufacturer (OEM) accepts the liabilities of their chassis, provided that the end user operates and maintains the chassis in accordance with the published operating and maintenance instructions.

2002
School Bus Order

New 2003 International/Blue Bird school buses are currently being assembled at the Blue Bird plant in Brantford, Ontario. Some of the new buses will be in Manitoba in late December, while the bulk of the order will arrive in January 2003.

C.S.A. D-250
School Bus Standard

The Canadian Standards Association School Bus Technical Committee is in the process of revising the D-250 standards. The Committee will be meeting in January 2003 to finalize the document. The new edition should be available in March-April 2003.

Strobe Light Control Switch

Clearance lights on a school bus must be illuminated when being operated after dusk. If a school bus has the strobe light connected to the clearance light circuit, the strobe light will be activated whenever the clearance lights are illuminated. In order to control the strobe light separately, it must be connected to a dedicated switch. Operating a school bus at night without clearance lights on is considered a driving infraction.
With a lot of design and development help from Joanne Zimmer in Russell, PTU has put the finishing touches on its new website. The site includes information on topics pertaining to pupil transportation - Bus Driver Instruction; Publications; Seminars and Events; Updates; School Bus Purchase; and, Contacts.

Also included in the site is an area pertaining to Failed Material Tags. Two different things can be accomplished from here:

1. **View reports listing Body and Chassis Component Failures.** These reports include a list of component failures, the number of failure occurrences, and time span of the failures. These reports will be updated at the end of each month.

2. **Complete and e-mail a fail tag to PTU.** The fail tag form has been simplified to include only the most pertinent information about a failure.

You can access the PTU website at:

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/ptu

Any comments or suggestions you may have about the website will be welcomed. To get in touch with us, check out Contacts on the site.

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**Transportation System Reviews**

Since January 1998, PTU has reviewed the transportation systems in 22 school divisions. Among many positives, the reviews are seen as beneficial in that they assist in identifying shortfalls within a division's school bus ridership and driver training programs. As an example, a school division may be advised to address the efficiency and safety concerns of a school bus loading area at a particular school.

Information compiled from each of the reviews assists in determining which areas of the provincial pupil transportation system need to be assessed for effectiveness. By evaluating ourselves on a regular basis, we can determine the improvements required to enhance the overall system.

**Yellow Cocoons Around Our Precious Cargo**

At the beginning of school this fall, PTU received a request from Beth Cruikshank, a writer for the *Farmer's Independent Weekly*. Beth was requesting information and statistics on bussing our children.

Her article can be found on the following pages. It should be noted that while PTU takes some small credit for the statistics, we had absolutely no previous knowledge of the horse - or the fire . . .
Yellow Cocoons Around Our Precious Cargo
Written by Beth Cruikshank for the Farmer’s Independent Weekly

With each new school year comes the return of a familiar sight, the big yellow school buses, to our rural scene. These great lumbering “kid cans” wend their tangled ways along the gravel roads and highways to scoop up children from the ends of thousands of farm lanes in the dull light of morning and spit them back out again with a satisfied hiss and snap of their doors each afternoon. They make themselves aggressively obvious, with their bright golden paint and plethora of flashing lights and moving arms. And it is a rare observer who, seeing one, does not experience a twinge of memory, good or bad, of his or her youthful days of riding the bus.

School buses are one of those services which make rural life function. They are generally taken for granted, often cussed by other drivers, and are a regular source of hassle for rural municipalities’ road maintenance crews. Still, those of us down on the farm have excellent reason to be grateful for them. There are about 1750 school buses in Manitoba, travelling thirty-three million kilometres every year as they regularly and safely ferry some sixty-one thousand kids back and forth to school. It’s hard to even imagine the logistics to be dealt with, if every family involved had to arrange this transportation on their own.

As well as being a great convenience, school buses are remarkably safe forms of transport. Far fewer children are injured or killed while riding in school buses than in any other type of motor vehicle. There are very lengthy and stringent regulations for school bus design set out by Transport Canada on the basis of extensive crash testing, and Manitoba Education and Training has additional safety requirements for buses in this province, even above and beyond those. Because of their excellent crash force dispersal, the vast majority of accidents involving school buses result in very minor injuries to their occupants, if any at all. In all of Canada less than one child each year, on average, dies while riding in a school bus (compared to around 500 in other motor vehicle accidents) and none in Manitoba in recent memory. Far more dangerous than riding in buses is being on the ground around them. Three to five times as many children are injured by being hit by a school bus, or by another vehicle illegally passing a school bus, than are injured while in one. And in those accidents the injuries tend to be far more serious and more often fatal.

School buses have a long and interesting history. As early as the late 1800’s, in the local school districts of the time, group transportation for children who lived some miles from a school was frequently provided by a horse-drawn covered wagon or sleigh. These “school vans” were simple affairs, and travelling in them was often quite an adventure. Many a tale is told yet among the elderly of horses running away, sleighs tipping and spilling their shrieking, tangled load into a snowy ditch, or of scraps among the boys which ended in one or more rolling out onto the road and having to run to catch up again and hop on the back. Since the sides of the vans were usually made only of canvas, heavy buffalo or horse-hide robes were often provided in winter for the children to huddle beneath, and hot bricks muffled in cloth laid under their feet.

With the consolidation of school districts into larger divisions came a more organized, motorized, provincially regulated bus system, which has evolved through innumerable changes into the wide-spread, efficient, $47 million system we know today. But travelling the school bus can still be an adventure.

Continued on the following page...
Our own children have come home with fascinating stories of arguments and sing-songs and deep worldly discussions on the bus; of childhood romances sweetly begun or tearfully ended while jouncing along the country roads; of hasty band practise in the back seats - with a saxophone and a tuba, no less; of frazzled drivers threatening dire retribution if they didn’t just SHUT UP; and of always, every day of one winter, getting stuck in the same narrow lane and having to be rescued by a neighbour and his trusty tractor. Their best story was undoubtedly of the day one of our ponies, a dim but amiable beast who had somehow gotten loose in the yard, decided to follow them onto the bus and go to school with them. He was head and shoulders inside and already eyeing up his choice of seats before the startled driver managed to grab hold of his halter and convince him into a reluctant retreat back out the door. The children were disappointed. Mary and her Little Lamb, they thought, would have had nothing on this when it came to Show and Tell.

Every school bus driver, too, has a host of hair-raising stories to tell. Of driving a bus full of other people’s children through a sudden, blinding snow squall with zero visibility over ice-glazed roads; of the kid who decided to try out the disposable lighter he had found somewhere and set the seat ahead of him on fire; of abruptly discovering what was REALLY in that box the little girl was carrying so carefully when a yowling, clawing kitten suddenly landed on the driver’s neck. And then there is the ultimate Driver’s Nightmare story, which might even be true; one winter morning after a severe ice storm, a school bus was slowly making its way down a gusty highway when, to her horror, the driver realized that a power line which crossed the road had stretched so low with ice that it now hung directly in their path. With no time to stop, the bus slammed into the wire. Amazingly, the line held, twanged taut under the impact as it jerked the bus to a stop, then, like a monstrous sling-shot, flung the bus backward a dozen feet or more. No one was hurt, but that particular driver had noticeably more grey hairs by the time she got her load safely to school.

But the stories and adventures are, of course, the exceptions. Most of the time the big yellow behemoths make their rounds without incident, picking up and dropping off their charges with comfortable reliability and more or less on time. And for their safety and service, and the sturdy, oft-tried patience of those who drive them, we who trust our offspring to their care are grateful.