

DID YOU KNOW???

STUDENTS, SCHOOL BUS “SEASON” HAS BEGUN

Now that another school year has begun, take a minute to review some of the traffic safety issues associated with schools. First, let’s review school speed zones. Whenever signs indicate a lower school speed zone, the applicable hours are supposed to be posted on the school speed zone signs. Unfortunately, many of the school speed zones in Franklin County do not have the hours stated. If the hours are not stated, state vehicle and traffic law (VTL) specifies that the speed limit can only be from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. on school days.

Some of our schools have flashing beacons denoting the school speed zone for that particular school. Where beacons are present, plaques will state “WHEN FLASHING” – thus the school speed zone limit is in effect only when the beacons are flashing. State law allows the school to flash the beacons outside the 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. time frame for school events. For instance, the school is allowed to flash the beacons in the evening for a school event such as a basketball game or a science fair.

Now let’s talk about school buses. Probably the worst thing any driver could encounter is hitting a child. How can any driver not see a big yellow school bus? And, when buses stop along our streets and roads to pick up or discharge students, they flash big red lights and two flashing red STOP signs – how is it possible to not see this?



So why, according to the New York Association for Pupil Transportation, do an estimated 50,000 motorists illegally pass a stopped school bus in NYS every school day? Certainly every driver knows it is dangerous and against the law to pass a stopped school bus with red lights flashing, no matter what state or province you are driving in.

Driver distraction, now the biggest problem in highway safety, is most likely a major factor, as drivers concentrate on things other than the task of driving. No matter the reasons, there is no excuse for passing a stopped school bus.

In NYS, you must stop whether you are approaching the school bus from the front or overtaking it from the rear. It is also illegal to pass a stopped school bus on divided and multi-lane highways, including Main St. in Malone. This law also covers school buses that are stopped on school property to load and discharge students – if the flashing red lights are on, you cannot pass the bus from any direction, even in school parking lots.

If you are convicted of passing a stopped school bus, five violation points are assigned to your driving record by NYS DMV. Additionally, first time offense fines for this infraction range from \$250 to \$400 plus applicable surcharges.

Enforcement agencies work closely with school districts, especially shortly after school resumes in the fall, and periodically throughout the school year, to enforce the vehicle and traffic laws applicable to passing stopped school buses and for violations of school speed zones.

Now that school is in session, pay attention to your driving, and NEVER pass a stopped school bus when the red lights are flashing. Be alert to students walking to/from school, and the possibility that students are riding their bicycles to school or back home. Safety for our children is the responsibility of all drivers! Are you on board?