

## Safety Alert

As Illinois school children return to school after their holiday break, I am writing to remind the driving public to be alert for children making their way to and from school.

Sadly, this year has seen at least eight kids across the U.S. killed by motorists who failed to stop for school buses loading or discharging passengers. Five of those kids were killed over two days in November, including a 9-year-old Rochester, Indiana, girl and her 6-year-old twin brothers. It is illegal to pass a school bus whose red stop lights are flashing in all 50 states.

A one-day survey of 38 states by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services recorded 84,000 incidents of motor vehicles illegally passing stopped school buses. That was in just one day.

My office has kept a close eye on these studies. As part of our Toby Tire School Bus Safety program, we emphasize the dangers of crossing the street, no matter the purpose or time of day. Our efforts have produced positive results. We lead the nation in school bus safety and have compiled an enviable record of fatality-free miles covered by our school buses.

School bus safety has been a priority of school administrators, teachers and parents, as well as my office during the 20 years I have served as Secretary of State. We warn children to *always* look both ways while crossing the street. That means *all the time*, not only while crossing in a school bus loading zone.

School bus safety is a responsibility to be shared by everyone in the community, not just parents and school officials. We all are stakeholders in the safety of our communities' children.

I encourage those with school-aged children to take time to remind them of the fundamentals of student transportation safety:

- Stay away from strangers.
- Always look both ways while crossing the street, even in bus loading zones.
- Maintain decorum on the bus by speaking in normal tones and always staying seated.
- Always stay clear of the 10-foot "danger zone" that surrounds the bus.

We must remain vigilant in our efforts to protect our children and ensure they get to and from school in a safe and responsible manner. We owe our children nothing less.

Jesse White  
Illinois Secretary of State