

# SAFE OPERATOR PROGRAM

## INTRODUCTION

The most important element of your job as a transit operator is *Safety First*. The *Safe Operator Program* is a pro-active effort to help prevent collisions and injuries through training and recognition of excellent driving skills. This program awards operators who practice *Safety First* with defensive driving and careful attention to those around them.

This program has four sections:

- Definitions
- Standards
- Process
- Recognition

## DEFINITIONS

### **Professional Bus Operator**

In relation to safe bus operation, the professional bus operator is a person who takes all precautions necessary to avoid collisions and/or injuries at all times. The professional bus operator, through training and experience, avoids these incidents by anticipating situations, interpreting the situation, and adjusting his/her driving to safely accommodate the situation. The professional operator is always a defensive driver, one who expects other drivers and pedestrians to make errors, and is constantly alert for these errors. In most cases, the professional bus operator avoids collisions and/or injuries regardless of surrounding conditions or the actions of others because he/she has anticipated the situation and adjusted for it.

### **Defensive Driving**

Driving with constant alertness to possible hazards around your vehicle and taking action to avoid these hazards. Possible hazards include surrounding conditions, weather, and the actions of other. The defensive driver anticipates the situation and takes action to avoid it or safely maneuver through it.

### **Collisions**

Any contact between a City vehicle and another moving or stationary object or pedestrian.

### **Injury**

Any time a person is hurt while standing in a bus boarding area, riding the bus or disembarking.

## **Preventable Collision/Injury**

When the operator could have anticipated the possibility of a collision/injury and could have avoided it by taking steps in his/her control to do so.

## **Non-Preventable Collision/Injury**

When the operator exercised all reasonable effort to avoid a collision/injury, and through no fault of his/her own was still involved in the accident.

## **STANDARDS**

### **Defensive Driving**

The responsibility of a transit operator is to drive safely and courteously. Driving defensively to prevent collisions and injuries ensures safety for the operator, safe transportation for the public, and reduces insurance and claim costs.

Defensive driving on your part requires:

1. Knowledge and strict observance of all traffic rules and regulations applicable to the State of South Dakota. You are responsible for adhering to all federal and any other state or local traffic laws. The consequence for failing to abide by the laws is the responsibility of the operator.
2. Constant alertness for the unsafe acts and driving errors of other drivers and the willingness to make timely adjustments in your driving so that these acts and errors will not involve you in a collision or injury. Being alert to traffic conditions around you and keeping your mind on driving will help you detect potentially hazardous situations and give you time to plan defensive actions to avoid them.
3. Adjustment of your driving techniques to adapt to hazards presented by abnormal, unusual or changing conditions in traffic, the mechanical functioning of your vehicle, type of road surfaces, weather, degree of light, or your physical condition and state of mind.
4. Taking no chances. Do not assume that all pedestrians and motorists will exercise the same degree of care or caution that you do. When nearing a street or highway intersection, look out for pedestrians and automobiles approaching from both directions, give sufficient warning of your presence and intentions, and don't take chances! Don't force your right-of-way at the risk of a collision or injury. Adjust your speed to prevailing conditions. It is important to carry passengers on schedule, but more important to carry them safely. **Safety should never be sacrificed for the schedule!**
5. An attitude of confidence that you can drive without having a preventable collision or injury.

## **Preventability Standards**

Collisions and injuries are either preventable or non-preventable. The following is a standard criteria for judging the preventability of incidents involving collisions and/or injuries, which occur while operating a City of Mitchell vehicle. These standards are based on proven defensive driving practices and generally accepted performance standards for the professional bus operator. This guide sets the minimum standards for the determination of preventability.

### **Mechanical Failure:**

The professional bus operator must inspect his/her vehicle before starting a trip to assure that all equipment is in good mechanical condition and safe to operate. All defects must be reported on the Vehicle Inspection Report. Operators also need to ensure that prior defects have been signed off by a mechanic on the Vehicle Inspections Report prior to taking that vehicle out on the street. Repairs should be made or a bus change requested prior to taking that vehicle out on the street if noted defects could cause or contribute to an incident. If a collision/injury is caused by mechanical failure that reasonably could have been detected by the operator, or results from a condition that should have been found during a pre-trip inspection, the incident is preventable.

If a mechanical defect occurs or develops during a trip, the driver should notify Dispatch immediately. If the trip is continued without such notification and an incident result, it is preventable.

Abusive driving which creates abnormal strain and leads to mechanical failure resulting in a collision/injury incident, is also classified as preventable.

### **Weather:**

Rain, snow, fog, ice, and sleet do not cause collision. These conditions merely increase the hazards of driving, and the driver must adjust accordingly. Incidents which result from the operator's failure to properly adjust driving to the existing conditions or operating the bus when instructed not to do so because of hazardous weather conditions are preventable.

### **Fixed objects:**

Collisions with fixed objects are almost always preventable. Such incidents usually involve failure to check or properly judge clearances, such as low overheads, buildings, poles, parked cars, etc. Asking a bystander's opinion on clearance does not relieve the operator of responsibility for the vehicle. Resurfaced pavement causing low overhead clearance, detours, and other changes in conditions along a route are not valid reasons for a collision/injury. Resulting incidents are preventable.

### Property Damage and Personal Injury:

Incidents which involve passenger injury but no collision are considered preventable if they are caused by improper driving. Passenger injuries caused by evasive action to avoid a collision are preventable if the driver failed to use defensive driving techniques to avoid the need for evasive action. Sudden starts or stops, speeding over bumpy roads, fast turns, and abrupt acceleration are considered unsafe driving and resulting incidents are preventable.

### Intersections:

The professional bus operator has the responsibility to approach, enter, and cross intersections prepared to avoid incidents that might occur because of the actions of other drivers. Such actions include excess speeding, crossing a lane in turning, and coming from behind a blind spot. The other driver's failure to obey the law or to heed traffic control devices does not automatically make the incident non-preventable. The professional bus operator's failure to take every precautionary measure prior to entering the intersection must be considered in making a decision of incident preventability. If a professional driver fails to check the cross traffic to ensure that it is going to stop or if the driver forces the right-of-way instead of yielding, then a resulting incident is preventable.

Incidents at intersections' such as alleys, driveways, factory entrances, etc., must be carefully reviewed to determine what action could have been taken to avoid the incident. Many of these intersections are blind and other driver's vision is blocked. Therefore, failure to slow down, sound a warning, or yield the right-of-way is considered sufficient cause to rule the incident preventable.

### Changing Traffic Lanes:

Passing is voluntary action and failure to pass safely indicates possible faulty judgment or a lack of consideration of all the factors affecting the maneuver. Actions of oncoming traffic or of the traffic being passed do not excuse the professional driver. These actions should be anticipated and considered before starting the maneuver.

Professional operators must yield to passing vehicles. This is accomplished by slowing down or moving to the right if the passing driver is trapped and a sideswipe or cut-off is imminent. Failure to do this will result in a preventable accident.

Lane encroachment incidents on the highway or in merging traffic indicate an unwillingness to yield to vehicles or to wait for a safe break in traffic. Blind spots are not a valid excuse; the professional operator must use extra caution to allow for areas of limited vision.

“Squeeze plays” involving fixed objects or other vehicles can be avoided by dropping back when it is apparent that the other driver is not going to yield. The professional bus operator always yields the right-of-way.

Pulling into traffic from a parked position is a lane change and the burden of responsibility is on the operator pulling out. An incident resulting from the operator pulling out from the curb is preventable.

### Front End and Rear End Collisions:

The professional bus operator can prevent front-end collisions by maintaining a safe following distance at all times. “Tailgating” is one of the most frequent causes of incidents and cannot be excused. Regardless of abrupt or unexpected stops or the actions of the driver ahead, the operator must be able to stop safely and smoothly. Night speed should be adjusted so that the stopping distance is not greater than the distance illuminated by the headlights.

Professional bus operators risk being struck from behind at all times because of frequent stops and other operational characteristics. Failure to signal the intention to turn, make a passenger stop, keep 4-way flashers on at all times during the passenger stop, or failure to slow down gradually for traffic signals or grade crossings which result in a rear end collision by the following driver, is a preventable incident.

Rolling forward or backward into a vehicle is the result of not keeping the vehicle under control, and is considered a preventable incident.

### Backing

It is extremely rare that a backing accident is ruled non-preventable. Even when being guided, the operator is not relieved of his/her responsibility to back safely. The guide is just an aid and cannot control the movement of the vehicle. The driver must personally check clearances.

### Turns:

Any time a professional bus operator leaves a traffic lane, he/she is completely responsible for the maneuver. Signaling is not enough; traffic on both sides and to the rear must be checked carefully before making a change. “Squeeze plays” caused by left or right turns are the responsibility of the driver making the turn. Failure to signal, signaling too late, failure to properly position for the turn, to check mirrors before and during the turn, or to take any other necessary defensive actions that results in a collision is a preventable incident

Incidents involving turns by other drivers may also be preventable if they operator failed to anticipate their actions. The non-turning bus operator may have failed to recognize that a turn was about to be made by the other vehicle and may have failed to take proper defensive action. In addition, the operator may not have yielded the right-of-way.

Any incident involving a U-turn on the part of the operator is preventable.

### Vehicles Going In Opposite Direction:

The head-on or sideswipe incident involving vehicles going in opposite directions is one of the most difficult to classify. The exact locations of each vehicle prior to the collision must be tracked to determine if the operator had sufficient time to avoid the incident. If the opposing vehicle was passing and in the operator's driving lane, and the operator failed to slow down, stop, or pull to the right or make an attempt to warn the other driver, then he/she failed to take proper defensive measures and the resulting incident is preventable.

### Violations of Law or Company Policy:

If an incident of any type results from violation of state or local traffic laws, or City of Mitchell's Driver Safety Performance Evaluation Policy, it is preventable. This also includes incidents that occur when the City vehicle is improperly parked in undesignated areas.

### Other Situations Not Described:

For any incident not described, determination of preventability must be based upon whether the operator

- properly assessed the situation
- made the proper judgment based on the situation
- reacted in a proper manner.

If the answer to any of these criteria is no, the incident was preventable.

## **PROCESS**

### **Operator Reporting Process**

Operator and passenger safety is always the first concern. It is critical that operators immediately notify Dispatch or a supervisor of any collision or injury, so that appropriate and immediate emergency response may be dispatched.

Operators must complete a City of Mitchell Incident Report when relieved of driving duties that same day.

If an operator fails to report a collision or injury incident in a timely manner, no matter how minor, corrective action will be taken and disciplinary action may be considered necessary.

If disciplinary action is considered appropriate, action will proceed in accordance with the City of Mitchell's Driver Safety Performance Evaluation Policy.

### **Determination Process**

Transit Supervisor and Director will investigate each incident involving a collision and/or injury. Transit Supervisor and Director will collect facts, evidence, and observations of the incident. The investigating supervisor will carefully consider relevant and available data and material, and determine if the incident was preventable or non-preventable. The investigating supervisor will then document the specific reasons why this incident was preventable or non-preventable, in a written "Determination of Preventability" statement. This determination will be reviewed by the Director before it is presented to the operator.

The Transit Supervisor will present the determination to the operator. At that time, the Transit Supervisor will also discuss any corrective training and any other appropriate corrective action, if warranted.

### **Training Recommendation**

When a preventable collision or injury occurs, the Transit Supervisor will make a formal recommendation for appropriate corrective training (see "Training Type" below) to the Director. If retraining is appropriate, the Transit Supervisor will ensure that the recommended training is conducted within 30 days of the incident unless there are extenuating circumstances. If re-training is not appropriate, such as if the operator has already received appropriate training for a similar incident within the past 12 months, the Transit Supervisor will note that training is not warranted.

## Training Type

To determine what type of training is appropriate, the Transit Supervisor will consider operator incident history, length of employment, nature and severity of incident, and history of training already received. Training will focus on the nature of the incident and specific defensive driving skills that could have been employed to avoid it.

Depending upon the severity of the incident and the operator's record of preventable incidents with the preceding 12 month period, disciplinary action may be considered necessary.

If disciplinary action is considered appropriate, action will proceed in accordance with the Driver Safety Performance Evaluation Policy.

## **RECOGNITION**

Recognition of an operator's ability to drive defensively and perform these skills is essential to a *Safe Operator Program*. Defensive driving equals *Safety First*.

Operators who successfully complete a 12 month period with no preventable collision, injuries, or traffic violations will be recognized for their safe driving accomplishment.

## **Incident Review Committee**

The operator must submit a written request for an Incident Review Committee to the Transit Supervisor. This request must be made within 5 working week days from the date when the operator received written notification of the investigating supervisors determination.

## Committee Members

The incident Review Committee Members will consist of:

- Director
- Transit Supervisor
- Public Safety
- Risk Management

## Review Procedure

1. Investigating Supervisor will present incident data and reasons for determination.
2. Operator involved will present incident data and reasons for requested review of determination.
3. Committee will review all incident data.
4. Committee will cast a private vote. Votes will be tallied for a simple majority decision.
5. Committee's determination of preventability will be final.

## **Corrective Action**

Training is the most important corrective action. If an operator is involved in an incident that is determined to be preventable, corrective action will follow.

Focused education gives operators an opportunity to review and strength defensive skills to help meet expected standards.

## Policy Training Completed:

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Bus Operator

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Date

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Director –

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Date

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Transit Supervisor –

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Date