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Safety 101: What You Should Know About Bus Safety

We are all saddened by the news of more injuries and deaths that have occurred due to charter bus crashes in the last few months. Being a part of the bus industry for nearly 60 years, we still stand by the fact that motor coach travel remains one of the safest modes of transportation. We can only hope these tragic events will allow Federal and State Agencies to increase their fight against shutting down bus carriers that operate unsafe buses and employ unqualified drivers as well as educate the public on what they can do before chartering a bus.

At this time we've been fielding a lot of questions concerning safety and felt for our customers' and the general public's benefit, they should know what to look for when chartering/riding with a bus company as well as give you some background information on our operations.

First Area of Safety to Consider: Buses

New York State bus companies must have each of their buses rigorously inspected by a NYSDOT Inspector every six months. If a bus is deemed "Out of Service" due to a safety defect, it cannot transport passengers until it has been re-inspected and passed. The results of these inspections are public knowledge and can be found online (see details at the end for link). New York State sets a pass rate goal of 90% for all bus companies to obtain.

At Onondaga Coach we have never fallen below this goal in all the years we've been in business. For the current year ending March 31, 2011, Onondaga Coach obtained a 100% pass rate on our 26 inspections. No other Syracuse area bus company achieved 100%! It should be known that there were some companies in the greater Upstate New York Region that failed to meet New York States 90% pass rate goal! There are some schools that won't allow their teachers, coaches, or students to contract a bus from a company that has not met this goal. Year after year we've consistently maintained a pass rate of above 90% while other companies fluctuate, sometimes significantly from year to year, with their pass/fail rates.

Looking at this data sheds some light on how much emphasis a company puts on the maintenance of their buses. Even new buses break down on the road from time to time, but Onondaga Coach is proud to let everyone know that our bus fleet continues to be one of the best maintained in our area. We annually spend over \$200,000 on parts to maintain our fleet and hold to "useful life" guidelines – we don't wait until something breaks nor do we ever cut corners to save a few dollars. To say the least, we have a lot riding on our buses and we take much pride in providing safe travel to all for nearly 60 years. Onondaga Coach has their own garage and full time mechanics that maintain our fleet on a daily basis.

Second Area of Safety to Consider: Drivers

New York State has one of the most strict bus driver qualification programs in place (both for pre-employment and to remain in compliance) compared to other states. "Article 19-A" is part of the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (NYSDMV) and spells out the rules and regulations that a bus driver (and bus company) must meet to be deemed qualified.

Before a driver can drive, they must go through an extensive background check, including a FBI Fingerprint check. Once that has been performed, they must have a valid NYS Commercial Driver License (CDL) with the proper class and endorsements to drive bus. Both annual and semi-annual behind the wheel, written, defensive driving, medical exam/card, and driver abstract checks must be maintained by the company for each driver. All New York State bus drivers must be 19-A qualified to drive; All Onondaga Coach Drivers are 19-A qualified.

At this time the public can't access data pertaining to driver qualifications but through the NYSDMV "Bus Driver Unit" in Albany, a roster of drivers for each company must be kept up-to-date and valid. Much of the responsibilities of maintaining a driver's 19-A file is up to the bus company themselves. Through random Federal and State Audits, bus company driver files can be checked for their accuracy. Within the past year, Onondaga Coach has been audited by USDOT, NYSDOT, and NYSDMV officials to make sure our driver's files and safety and preventative maintenance programs are up-to-date and being accurately kept. We are proud to say for each of these audits, we were awarded the highest pass level and no violations or concerns were found. Any company found to not abide by these rules faces penalties, fines, and could possibly lose their operating authority to transport passengers.

Monitoring drivers and keeping them refreshed with safety meetings and bulletins is just part of the program we have in place. All of our buses are GPS tracked to record actual location, time, and speed. All of our buses are governed to not exceed 72 mph. We also have cameras on the bus that can record inside and outside the bus an event that turns the camera on (i.e. a sudden stop). This gives us information on how our drivers are doing. We know our drivers and work as a team to remain safe.

You should also know that just about every school district in our area performs "pre-trip" checks of charter buses for school trips before the bus departs. School District Transportation Personnel understand 19-A as school bus drivers must also be qualified under 19-A. Checking buses (lights, tires, horn, fire extinguisher, valid inspection sticker/registration, etc.) and driver qualifications (valid license and medical card) is a routine process. School districts in our area have always been able to rely on Onondaga Coach as we always supply well maintained buses and qualified drivers. We've had the opportunity to help a local district out at the last minute when they found out another area bus company tried to put a non 19-A qualified driver on their school trip; which is completely unacceptable.

Additional Thoughts & Helpful Website Links

- ✓ Oftentimes customers will search for the cheapest bus quote possible, but in our opinion, price should not be the only guideline for choosing a bus company. Many will shop around but taking a low price or a too good to be true price should raise a red flag. It takes a lot to maintain a bus, let alone a fleet... how much is your safety really worth?
- ✓ Don't be afraid to look at the bus company's website and investigate their history, customer feedback, etc. Ask if you can stop by their garage and see a bus. You should also get a sense of how easy it is to get in touch with them by phone/email and work with them start to finish through the process. Ask for a company's USDOT number as this is important to know when searching online for safety results. Onondaga Coach's USDOT # is 15288.
- ✓ [CLICK HERE... Federal Level: A comprehensive up-to-date report on a bus company's safety \(USDOT\)](#)
- ✓ [CLICK HERE... State Level: Bus inspection results and an overview of the Bus Safety Program \(NYSDOT\)](#)
- ✓ [CLICK HERE... State Level: Specific information concerning "Article 19-A" \(NYSDMV\)](#)
- ✓ [CLICK HERE... View our website to learn more about Onondaga Coach](#)

Thank you for taking the time to read this Safety Bulletin from Onondaga Coach