

A reminder that stopping for school buses is mandatory

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Constable Joel Devenish, community safety/media relations officer with the Bancroft detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police issued a media release last week reminding everyone that with students' return to school and school buses returning to our roads, that stopping for buses when they're stopped and have their lights flashing is mandatory and not an option as some drivers seem to think. It is sad that this is something that people need to be reminded of year after year, but unfortunately it is necessary.

According to SchoolBusOntario.ca, there are 20,000 school buses and school purpose vehicles in Ontario and approximately 18,000 plus drivers, with over 830,000 students transported daily across the province. And while many drivers operate their vehicles in a safe and responsible manner around these school buses, many do not.

Ontario Ministry of Transportation data estimates that over 30,000 drivers illegally pass school buses every day. Excuse me? What are these tens of thousands of drivers thinking doing something so foolish? The answer is, they're not, but the cost of their lack of thought and inattentiveness could be, and sometimes is deadly. Fortunately, the penalties for not stopping for a school bus that has come to a stop with its lights flashing are severe. For the first offence, a fine of \$400 to \$2,000 and six demerit points, while subsequent offences carry a fine of \$1,000 to \$4,000, six demerit points and possible incarceration for up to six months. To further ensure these motorists are caught and charged, Ontario passed the Safer School Zones Act in 2017 which authorized the use of Automated School Bus Stop Arm Camera Systems to detect cases where motorists pass stopped school buses when the stop arm was extended and the lights were flashing. For more information on school bus safety, please go to www.ontario.ca/page/school-bus-safety.

OPP officers have a zero-tolerance approach to any motorists who don't adhere to this traffic law and will be watching motorists closely for any drivers who disobey it. Under section 175 of the Ontario Highway Traffic Act, motorists approaching a stopped school bus with its red lights flashing must come to a complete stop before reaching the bus and not proceed until the lights have gone off and the bus is in motion once again. This applies whether you are meeting or following a bus and includes multi-lane roads. The only exception to this is on a road with a median, as traffic coming from the opposite direction is not required to stop. In addition, owners of the offending vehicles can be charged if their vehicle illegally passes a stopped school bus, even if they weren't driving.

Aside from school bus safety, the OPP stresses that drivers should also be prepared to yield to student pedestrians and cyclists, and students' parents are encouraged to speak with their kids about the rules of the road if they're walking or cycling to school.

So, take heed the words of the Honourable Sherry Gambin-Walsh, Minister of Service, Newfoundland and Labrador, who reminded motorists to remain vigilant around school buses in a 2019 news release.

?Just a split second can change your life and the life of a child and their family forever. Motorists must drive with extreme caution in school zones. Know the rules, obey the signage, and please, do not drive distracted.?