

Ntsb Urges Ban On Cell Phones

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The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is urging federal and state governments to prohibit motorcoach, transit and school bus drivers from using cell phones while driving those vehicles, except in emergencies.

The recommendations are contained in the NTSB’s report on a non-fatal motorcoach accident that occurred Nov. 14, 2004, on the George Washington Parkway in Alexandria, Va.

The motorcoach driver, who was talking on a hands-free cell phone, drove his bus into a bridge. The impact destroyed the roof of the bus and injured 11 student passengers, one seriously. There was no evidence that the driver applied the brakes before his bus hit the bridge.

“Professional drivers who have dozens of passengers’ lives entrusted to them should devote their full attention to their task,” said NTSB Chairman Mark Rosenker. “What we saw in this accident is appalling and could have resulted in great tragedy.”

According to NTSB investigators, there were signs warning of the 10-foot, 2-inch bridge clearance in the lane in which the 12-foot-high motorcoach was traveling. The bus should have been traveling in the left lane, where clearance was 13 foot, 4 inches.

The NTSB concluded that the driver’s cell-phone distraction caused the accident and recommended that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration along with all 50 states and the District of Columbia prohibit CDL holders with a passenger or school bus endorsement from using cell phones while driving those vehicles.

In its report, the NTSB also found that the low vertical clearance of the bridge, which does not meet current standards, contributed to the

accident.

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- While operating a bus, cell phones and pagers **MUST NOT** be worn on the operator’s person, nor carried in any manner where they are visible to supervision or the general public.
- Cellular phones and pagers **MUST** be turned off while operating a bus.
- While operating a bus, pagers and cellular phones may be carried, when concealed with the operator’s personal effects. ***Do not have pagers and cellular phones on your person.***
- Any text messages, voice mail, e-mail or other pager/cellular phone messages, **MUST NOT** be viewed or acknowledged while operating a bus.
- Hands-free devices for telephones, pagers and/or other equipment **MUST NOT** be used, worn, or displayed while operating a bus. Such devices included, but are not limited to: earpieces, earphones, headphones, mouthpieces etc.
- At the terminals, after the bus has been properly secured, bus operators may view messages and use cellular phones, provided this does not contribute to or cause a delay of service or inconvenience customer.
- Operators observed operating buses using radios, pagers, cellular phones and/or wearing mouthpieces, earpieces Without prior medical consent), earphones or headphones, will be subject to disciplinary action.

Currently, the Transit Authority is asking for heavy suspension time (20 days). DO NOT SIT IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT WITH THE PHONE.