FLOOD PREPAREDNESS FOR SCHOOL BUS CONTRACTORS

Floods are unpredictable. While river and coastal flooding are two of the most common types, heavy rains, poor drainage, dam failure and even nearby construction projects can put any area at risk for a flood event.

School Bus Contractors should have a written, up-to-date Emergency Action Plan in place to respond to potential flooding in the immediate area. Taking steps to ensure your fleet is properly cared for prior to high waters is paramount in safeguarding your vehicles and protecting your students and staff during a flood event.



FLOOD EVENTS

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues a variety of information statements related to flood events, including the following: Flash Flood Warnings, Flood Warnings and Flood Advisories, which the public is encouraged to “take action” upon receipt; and Flash Flood Watches and Flood Watches, which the public is encouraged to “be prepared” upon receipt.

Flash floods are a specific type of flooding that are dangerous, sudden, and violent—developing in as little as a few minutes—and can even occur in areas where there is no rainfall.

RISK FACTORS

There is no such thing as a no-risk-zone but some areas have a lower or moderate risk. It is crucial to assess the risks specific to your location. Visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Map Service Center online at fema.gov/flood-maps to find the flood map for your area.

FEMA FLOOD ZONE RATING:

- High-risk flood areas have at least a 1% annual chance of flooding, which equates to a 26% chance of flooding over a rolling 30-year period.
- Moderate-to-low zones are outside the 1% annual flood risk floodplains. Approximately 25% of all claims paid for flooding originate from moderate-to-low zones, so these areas should not be overlooked.
- Undetermined-risk areas, labeled with the letter D, are areas where no flood analysis has been conducted, but a flood risk still exists.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

School Bus Contractors should develop a comprehensive Emergency Action Plan that, at a minimum, includes clear guidelines on alternate locations, escape routes, relocating vehicles, transferring passengers and communication channels. Your emergency action plan should be developed, distributed, and trained to all staff members before a severe weather event.

Consider the following items within your plan:

- How will the school or school district be notified of Flood Warnings and Flood Watches?
- Who will have the authority to initiate the plan? How will this person be prepared to make decisions?
- Who is responsible for communicating with school district officials?
- How will staff be alerted in the event of a weather emergency?
- Which buses, vehicles and equipment are critical and must be moved first should there be a severe weather event?
- How will students and staff be accounted for before, during and after a flood?
- Decide on an alternate site(s) located on high ground and outside your flood zone. A widespread flood event may necessitate you to relocate vehicles/buses and equipment for several days or weeks, so choose the site with an eye toward security as well as elevation.
- Consider primary and secondary travel routes to the alternate site. Depending on the severity and speed of the flood onset, your regular travel routes may be blocked. Prohibit drivers from driving through flooded areas.
- Proceed to higher ground? Proceed to an evacuation center? While students are almost always safer on the bus than off, there are some situations in which it may be necessary to evacuate your bus.
- In certain emergencies, you may be required to transfer students from your bus to another bus to complete a route or get students to a reunification site.

Review your plan at least annually and update it as needed. It's also useful to critique your flood response following an actual event to troubleshoot and make improvements.

SUMMARY

Flooding can happen anywhere and at any time. School Bus Contractors should plan what to do before, during and after a flood event. Think about which staff, materials, procedures and equipment are necessary to protect your fleet and keep it operating the next time the water rises.

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