



NCPTA Position Paper

School Bus Operations – High Winds

One of the primary goals of the North Carolina Pupil Transportation is to ensure safety in all aspects of pupil transportation. It is imperative that our students transported to and from school using North Carolina school buses have a safe trip to and from school. Included in that trip to and from school is ensuring student safety on the way to, from and while at assigned school bus stops. This position paper focuses on ensuring student safety related to operating school buses when high winds may affect the ability to safely operate larger profiled vehicles.

North Carolina is a diverse state in many respects; topography varies widely from the flat lying coastal areas, which are at or close to sea level, through the rolling hills of the piedmont to the over 5,000 feet in elevation in the western mountains. North Carolina's location on the eastern seaboard of the United States subjects our state to a multitude of weather events, many of which create very windy conditions for sustained periods of time. Thus, operating school buses during times of inclement weather that include high winds becomes almost inevitable.

Transportation Departments across North Carolina are challenged with making decisions about when to operate buses when high winds are present and how to properly define the meaning of "high winds". Most often, watches and warnings for tropical systems with gale force winds are issued beginning at 39 mph (tropical storms); high wind warnings are issued when sustained winds reach 40 mph or greater (source: National Weather Service or "NWS"). The NWS also states "these winds will make it difficult to drive high profile vehicles".

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the NCPTA, that the following statement(s) apply to operating school buses during high wind events:

When weather conditions exist or are forecast to exist resulting in sustained winds above 35 mph, school buses should not be operated. It is recommended that any decision to cease school bus operations during high wind events should be coordinated with the Superintendent, the Office of Emergency Management and local Law Enforcement.

NCPTA further recommends that the State Board of Education adopt this statement as a part of the Board's policy that governs student transportation in North Carolina.