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"All employees using MTA vehicles shall fasten their seat belts upon entering the vehicle and shall keep them fastened as long as the vehicle is in operation...." --Metro Safety Policy #9, Section 1.1



Operator Jacquelyn Parchman demonstrates proper use of the seat belt.

New Safety Policy Will Require Bus Operators to Wear Seat Belts

- Policy will take full effect Jan. 1, 2005
- Operators will be trained in proper seat belt use
- [Would 'buckling up' have prevented these accidents?](#)

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 13, 2004) It was the height of the afternoon rush hour on the Hollywood Freeway that Thursday, Sept. 19, 1996, when a Honda struck the side of a Metro Bus.

The force of the collision knocked the operator – who was not belted in – out of his seat. The bus careened out of control, crossed the center divider and crashed into several other vehicles.

The result? Two deaths, seven injuries. And Metro paid a legal settlement of \$2.3 million to the victims.

Would the accident have been as severe if the operator had been buckled into a seat belt?

New seat belt policy

Robert Torres, a Systems Safety manager, doesn't think so. That's why he's helping put into effect a new policy that requires operators to wear seat belts when driving a Metro Bus. Safety Policy #9 takes effect Nov. 1, 2004.

During the orientation period, which ends Dec. 31, 2004, bus operators are

PHOTOS: LUIS INZUNZA



Division 18 Operator Jacquelyn Parchman is safely buckled in to her seat and ready to welcome patrons on board her Metro Bus.

expected to become accustomed to wearing seat belts. Management will educate employees about the policy and perform safety contacts about proper seat belt use.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2005, failure to wear a seat belt becomes a major safety rule infraction subject to disciplinary action.

"Wearing seat belts increases safety for both the operators and our riders," says Safety Director Jim Pachan. "It helps make sure the operator has control over the vehicle at all times by remaining in the seat in an accident or when the vehicle swerves."

All bus operator trainees will be instructed in the proper use of seat belts. Seat belt training also will be included during every operator's annual Verification of Transit Training (VTT) refresher course.

Others require seat belts

Torres notes that, of the nation's largest transit systems, only Metro has not required mandatory use of seat belts. Transit properties in Southern California that require seat belt use include OCTA, Santa Monica, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Norwalk, Long Beach and Foothill Transit.

Over the years, many bus operators have resisted wearing seat belts, says Torres, because they were uncomfortable or because the operators believed they would not be able to respond quickly in an assault or confrontation with a passenger.

To answer the need for operator comfort during long drives, Metro has retrofitted every coach in the fleet with 72-inch seat belts. The retractable belts, with a button release, will fit operators of every size and shape.

Training in the use of seat belts should ease operators' concerns about defending themselves, Torres says. An LAPD study showed that – after minimal training – officers wearing seat belts could exit their vehicles just as quickly as they could when driving unbelted.

Metro Bus operators will be trained to quick-release a seat belt, swivel in the driver's seat and use their feet and legs to ward off any attacker. Torres also believes the widespread use of video surveillance cameras in buses should reduce the number of assaults or passenger confrontations.

453 injured in collisions

He cites a Metro study from Dec. 1, 2002 through Dec. 31, 2003, that found a total of 453 bus operators were injured in traffic collisions. From Jan. 1, 2002 through Dec. 31, 2003, however, there were only 39 unprovoked attacks on Metro Bus operators and other employees.

A study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows that collisions are the leading cause of death and injury on the job, accounting

Would 'Buckling Up' Have Prevented These Accidents?

January 27, 2004. While making a turn at El Molino and Mariposa avenues, the operator slips from the driver's seat and falls onto the floor of the bus. The out-of-control bus hits several cars and damages a building. The injured operator is off work for a period. Damage and medical claims estimates exceed \$60,000.

February 23, 2004. A Metro Bus hits something hard on the surface of Foothill Boulevard. The operator is jostled from the seat and momentarily loses control of the bus, barely missing a utility pole. Bus damages and other costs exceed \$3,500.

March 1, 2004. At Vermont and Beverly, a Metro Bus operator swerves on a rain-slick street to miss an SUV. The operator falls out of the driver's seat but manages to keep her foot on the brake, avoiding a collision. The operator is injured. Cost estimates are pending.

for 30 percent of all workplace fatalities.

The same study showed that use of lap-shoulder belts reduced the risk of fatal injury to front-seat occupants by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injuries by 50 percent.

"Metro Bus operators owe it to themselves, to their passengers and to the other motorists and pedestrians around them to provide the safest ride possible," says Torres. "Operators need to understand that by wearing a seat belt, there's an excellent chance they'll finish their careers without ever having an injury."

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