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Disciplinary Action on Operator Seat Belt Use Postponed

(Dec. 8, 2004) The new policy requiring operators to wear seat belts when driving a Metro Bus went into effect, Nov. 1, but a plan to make failure to wear the safety device a major safety rule infraction subject to disciplinary action has been postponed.

"The seat belt policy is still in effect," says Deputy CEO John Catoe, "and we want to encourage all employees to use them."

Noting that the safety infraction rule was to have been effective, Jan. 1, 2005, Catoe said enforcement of operator disciplinary action has been delayed until an arbitrator can rule on the matter. A hearing has been scheduled for March 10.

Metro made a non-binding agreement with the UTU, after the union sought an injunction in Superior Court to stop enforcement of any disciplinary action for operators' failure to use seat belts.

Coaches retrofitted with new belts

Metro Operations has retrofitted every coach in the fleet with 72-inch seat belts. The retractable belts, with a quick-release button, will fit operators of every size and shape.

Metro Bus operators currently are being trained in the proper use of the retractable seat belts. Seat belt training will be included in every operator's annual Verification of Transit Training (VTT) refresher course.

Metro safety officials have cited studies showing that between Dec. 1, 2002 and Dec. 1, 2003, a total of 453 bus operators were injured in traffic collisions.

Officials point to three cases this year – two in February and one in March – in which Metro Bus operators fell out of the driver's seat and lost control of the bus. All three incidents resulted in injuries and damages.

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