

Liz Buckner
County Extension Agent-FCS
Rusk County

Newspaper Column

Back to School Safety for Drivers, Bicyclists and Pedestrians

Just when summer is really starting to heat up in Texas, it is almost time for children to go back to school. Soon motorists will be sharing the roads with school buses, pedestrians, bicycle riders, and lots of new teen drivers taking their first car to school. According to the National Safety Council, teen car crashes spike in September when they are driving to and from school. Drivers young and old need to be vigilant because child pedestrians can be very unpredictable. They are easily distracted and can often run into traffic or out from behind parked cars. Looking out for children rather than expecting them to look out for us is our best defense as drivers.

Distracted driving is always dangerous, but it is especially dangerous in and around school zones. According to the Texas Department of Transportation, crashes in school zones are most commonly due to driver inattention, failure to control speed, and failure to yield the right-of-way at stop signs. As responsible drivers, we need to put down the phone and pay attention in school zones. In fact, it is illegal to use a cell phone in a school zone.

Whether your oldest is just starting kindergarten or taking that first trip to school in his or her own car, parents can play an important role in keeping their children safe. For young children, make sure they know the rules about school bus safety when it comes to boarding and getting off the bus. If you are transporting children to school, remember that children under 13 should always ride in the back seat in a car seat (including a booster) or seat belt depending on whether they fit properly in the seat belt. Teen drivers and their parents should be aware of the Texas Graduated Driver License Law and the restrictions it puts in place, including no cell phone use at all and no more than one passenger under 21 in the vehicle unless the passenger is related to the driver. And, most importantly, always stress buckling up on every trip – even on those short trips to and from school!

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Rusk County, reminds drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians to follow these safety tips from the Texas Department of Transportation to prevent needless tragedies.

Tips for Driving in School Zones

- Put away your cell phone. Cell phone use is banned in active school zones, and violators face fines from \$200 to \$500.
- Always obey school zone speed limit signs. Remember, traffic fines usually double in school zones.
- Drop off and pick up your children in your school's designated areas, not the middle of the street.
- Keep an eye on children gathered at bus stops.
- Be alert for children who might dart across the street or between vehicles on their way to school.

Tips for Bicyclists

As a bicyclist, you should wear a helmet and obey all traffic laws, including the following:

- Stop at red lights and stop signs.
- Pay attention to lane markers.
- Ride near the curb, traveling in the same direction as traffic.

- Use a light on the front and a red reflector or red light on the back of your bike while riding at night.

Tips for Pedestrians

- When there is a sidewalk, use it! Most pedestrians involved in traffic crashes due to walking in the roadway.
- Remember, texting or listening to mobile devices can distract you from your surroundings.
- Always cross at intersections and pay attention to the control signal. Look left, then right, then left again before proceeding and try to make eye contact with drivers before you cross the street. If a crossing guard is available, wait for the guard to lead you across.
- Look for traffic when stepping off a bus or from behind parked cars.
- As a passenger, get in or out of a car on the curb side of the street.

Motorists can make a big difference by remembering to drive with extra caution when driving in and around school zones. Your slower speed and extra attention may very well save a life!

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating