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PART I: SAFETY FIRST

Introduction

Today's motorcoach is one of America's safest means of travel. It's also one of the most comfortable and affordable ways to move any travel group, making it the transportation mode of choice for thousands of public and private, elementary, middle and high schools and hundreds of colleges and universities who travel millions of miles each year on after-school and extracurricular trips.

Safe student motorcoach travel, however, isn't automatic. Travel planners, school administrators, students, parents and everyone associated with "student activity" transportation must exercise a strong concern for "safety first," good judgement and some basic advance research before selecting a motorcoach company to perform the trip.

This guide, created by the United Motorcoach Association (UMA), North America's largest association of professional bus and motorcoach companies, is the result of a cooperative effort with UMA's highway safety partners in the federal and state governments, the law enforcement community and the professional motorcoach industry. It is designed to serve as a "*student motorcoach travel best practices manual*" to help those who plan, schedule and conduct student activity trips to make the right choices and to better understand each element of motorcoach travel.

The basics for safe travel.

- 1. Not all motorcoach companies are equally safe.** While there are stringent safety regulations in place at the federal level (the "Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations," or FMCSR's; the complete set of regulations can be found online at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) website, <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov>) and similar laws at virtually every state level, they represent the minimum safety requirements for a commercial motor carrier of passengers to remain in business. Most carriers will operate well above these minimum rules. Some, inevitably, will operate outside the rules. Student travel planners need a way to distinguish between safe and unsafe operators.
- 2. Price must not be your reason for selecting an operator.** While the price of the trip is important, it must not be the most important criteria for selecting a carrier. As we discuss in Part II of this guide, price does relate to safety in many critical ways that a motorcoach consumer needs to understand. High prices don't automatically infer a safe carrier, nor do low prices automatically signal an unsafe carrier, but good safety practices are expensive. If competitive pricing is important, student trip planners need to understand why prices differ. Turn to Part II for a more complete discussion.
- 3. Turn to the experts.** While this guide and others can help you understand those elements which determine a motorcoach company's comparative safety, most travel planners -- both casual and professional -- are unqualified to make the final determination. The UMA and many state, federal and school transportation safety authorities strongly endorse the use of a "pre-qualification" process which allows knowledgeable safety examiners to carefully scrutinize all competing bus and motorcoach companies on a periodic basis. The result of that process is an "approved carrier" list of companies -- all of whom meet the necessary safety requirements and all of whom are eligible to bid on student travel needs. Whether that list is compiled by a state, a school district or an individual school itself, it must be accompanied by an absolute and unwavering mandate that no student travel may occur on a carrier who has not been approved by the experts using the established pre-qualification review. This guide will help you identify some of the experts.
- 4. Research -- well in advance of travel -- is important.** If a safe carrier pre-qualification process isn't yet available or if you'd just like to understand that process better or double-check the work that has been done, simple research is the answer. With the phenomenal growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web, the information you need is often just a few clicks away. The checklist in this section will provide background for many of the issues you should ask about when you individually review a carrier for service with your district.

Even at this stage, remember that just asking the questions isn't enough to make your trip a safe one. It's critical that you enlist someone to take part in your review who understands the answers. It does no good, for example, to ask for copies of the driver's Motor Vehicle Records (MVR's), if no one in the review committee understands how to read them or how

to determine what's important and what isn't. Ask a motor carrier professional for help; simultaneously, discourage interpretations or guesswork by non-professionals.

Remember, too, that if your student groups use a professional travel agency or broker to make all the arrangements, the travel agent must understand that they may book transportation only with companies who have been qualified using the school system's approved list or by a qualified motor carrier professional. Most travel agents and brokers are focused on cost, convenience and schedules but they are not bus and motorcoach safety specialists. Many commercial coach companies today offer their own travel planning services. Because of that, they're fully capable to make complete travel arrangements for your group within the guidelines dictated by safe highway transport. If you're unsure of the travel agent's affiliation with the motorcoach company who will be providing transport, don't be bashful about asking. If there is no corporate connection, ask the agent to identify the motor carrier so that you may conduct your own safety research.

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Carrier research checklist.

Ask the company for its USDOT identification number.

The number is your best tool to begin your safety review of the motor carrier. All commercial bus and motorcoach companies operating across state lines must be granted "interstate authority" by the FMCSA. That authority requires a minimum insurance coverage, continued operation within federal and state safety rules and subjects the company and its vehicles and drivers to safety review and inspection by federal and state authorities at any time.

Review the carrier's record online.

The USDOT number serves as your key to online research of the carrier's safety record. Go the USDOT's motor carrier safety website at <http://www.safersys.org>, which can provide you with a snapshot of the carrier's safety record. The site will tell you:

- If the carrier is authorized to transport passengers for hire;
- If the carrier has current insurance in force;
- The carrier's record of regulatory violations or "out-of-service" incidents; those times when a vehicle or a driver is found to be in violation of the rules, and a comparison to national averages;
- a) The carrier's highway accident record;
b) The carrier's current USDOT "safety rating," if any, and the date of the carrier's last "compliance review," or onsite inspection by authorities.

-- When you review the carrier's SAFER record, remember that a) all

highway accidents are recorded, whether or not they are judged to be the fault of the commercial carrier; and b) that fewer than half of all authorized passenger carriers have undergone "compliance reviews." Many may, therefore, have no USDOT safety rating. The absence of a safety rating does not indicate that a carrier is either good or bad; nor does the presence of an accident on the SAFER records. You should not hire a carrier with an "unsatisfactory" or "conditional" safety rating.

Verify the company's current insurance coverage.

All commercial motor carriers of passengers must maintain minimum insurance coverage to remain authorized to perform interstate service. Operators of vehicles capable of carrying 15 or fewer passengers must maintain coverage of at least \$1.5 million; those operating larger vehicles must maintain coverage of at least \$5 million. Records online may or may not be up-to-the-moment; to be certain of the carrier's coverage, you should ask the insuring company to send you verification of the carrier's coverage directly, indicating that the coverage is or will be in place on the dates of your travel. If you will be a continuing customer, you may also wish to ask the carrier to add you as an "additional insured party" on his policy. By doing so, you will receive direct communications about the carrier's insurance coverage from the insurance company.

Verify the carrier's qualification of drivers and vehicles.

All drivers must possess a current "commercial drivers license (CDL) issued by your state for the class of vehicle they will be driving, and a current medical certificate indicating that they have met physical qualifications within the previous two years. No driver should be operating the vehicle across state lines under a suspended or state-authorized exempt status.

c) Complete driving records or "abstracts," and medical certification records are privileged documents, protected under federal and state privacy regulations. Only the driver's commercial license and a proof of medical qualification "card" are available for your review.

Drivers and other "safety-sensitive" employees, such as mechanics, are required to participate in drug and alcohol testing programs. Verify that the motor carrier has such a program in place. Because of federal restrictions, driver test results and records are not available for your review.

All commercial vehicles must be inspected at least once annually to certify their mechanical fitness and compliance. Some states perform this inspection; in those locations where there is no mandatory state inspection process, the carrier himself is required to conduct the annual inspection. Ask to see the most recent inspection

report.

Ask about the equipment that will be used.

Student activity transportation can be performed in many sizes and styles of vehicles, but some types of equipment are better than others, depending on the size of the travel group and the distances to be covered. Classic "yellow school buses," such as those used for daily student travel to and from school classes, are best used for short, local, transportation of no more than a few miles. Most lack separate storage areas and individual seating, generally making them unsuitable for extended travel.

(1) Vans, especially those operated by non-professional drivers, have been deemed unsafe for extended student travel by both the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Full-sized motorcoaches (best described as those vehicles with seating capacity of 20-or more adults and a baggage containment area beneath the passenger compartment floor), though not constructed to school bus specifications, are designed specifically for extended highway travel and are considered the one of the safest forms of highway transport.

Source: [NTSB Highway Special Investigation Report "Pupil Transportation In Vehicles Not Meeting Federal Schoolbus Standards."](#) NTSB Report Number: SIR-99-02, adopted on 06/08/1999. The NTSB also sent letters to all 50 governors urging the passage of state laws prohibiting van use in student travel. NTSB website: www.nts.gov.

[NHTSA press release of April 9, 2001](#), and associated document warning of the dangers of 15-passenger vans. "...federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students..." NHTSA website: www.nhtsa.gov.

Verify that the trip can be done within federal "hours-of-service" and common sense limitations.

By federal law, commercial bus and motorcoach drivers may drive for no more than 10-hours during any duty day and may not drive a commercial vehicle at all after being "on-duty" for 15-hours. At the end of their duty day, they must be afforded at least eight hours off duty for the purposes of reest. After no more than 70-hours of duty in any work week, a driver may not drive a commercial motor vehicle before being afforded at least 24-hours off duty for rest before he may again operate a commercial vehicle.

[NOTE: While there are no restrictions on the way a commercial driver may use his personal time, any time spent at a "compensated" endeavor is considered "on-duty" for the purpose of determining when the driver may again operate a commercial

*vehicle. If a driver, for instance, works at a second job, he must have at least eight-hours' rest from **all** compensated jobs before again driving a commercial motorcoach.]*

The use of two or more drivers for uninterrupted travel generally requires the advance placement of relief drivers at locations along the travel route. Unless a USDOT-certified "sleeper berth" is in place on your bus or motorcoach, a second driver riding on the same bus and the first will extend driving time only to 15-hours (for both drivers) before a rest period is required.

***Note:** The FMCSA has observed that many student groups begin their travel late in the day or evening and request that the motorcoach drive through the night to arrive at their destination the following morning. While uninterrupted travel through the night and early morning is not prohibited by any regulation, the FMCSA strongly recommends that planners consider alternatives to such practices.*

Many drivers who share early morning hours on the road with commercial motorcoaches are not limited by federal rules and are likely to be highly susceptible to fatigue. In most cases, simply starting your travel earlier in the first day will allow your driver -- and the passengers -- a full eight- to 10-hour overnight rest period. That, in turn, can save the cost of relief drivers and also allow your travel group to arrive at their destination fresh, well-rested and most within minutes of the original arrival time.

The FMCSA strongly recommends that you work closely with your chosen carrier to confirm a safe, legal and comfortable travel itinerary well before you embark on your trip. In addition, we recommend that you emphasize the importance of maintaining that well-planned schedule to chaperons and student travelers alike. Changes while on route should be discouraged for all but emergency circumstances.

Verify the carrier's "subcontracting" practices.

Motorcoach companies often turn to other carriers for drivers and equipment when travel groups are too large or the original carrier's schedule is too busy to accommodate your travel. Ask your chosen carrier if he expects to "subcontract" any part of your travel needs and with whom. If any of your travel group is to be carried by another company, ensure that all of the companies used meet the same criteria you would impose on your chosen, primary, carrier.

Ask about breakdown or emergency procedures.

Establish clear, 24-hour, lines of communication and points of contact with your

motorcoach operator and know how they will handle a breakdown or emergency while on route. Many motorcoach companies have established strong lines of support through professional associations and nationwide business consortiums.

Ask about routing procedures and preparation.

If your travel group will be visiting a destination which is new or unfamiliar to the driver, ensure that your itinerary is available early enough that the motorcoach company and driver may plan a route, secure maps or seek directions which will prevent delays or driving surprises.

Check the company's business record.

Check with the local Better Business Bureau, local law enforcement agencies and other travel group planners in your area for a better understanding of the motorcoach company's violations, service and business practices and reliability.

Refresh your research seven days before travel takes place:

One full week before each trip is to start, go back online and re-confirm the carrier's safety rating and insurance coverage. If something's changed, contact the carrier immediately for explanations.

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Summary and additional resources.

Following the steps in this part can help you to feel more confident about the safety of the motorcoach provider you've chosen for your student activity travel. But it isn't "the end of the line" for those who have a sincere interest in making safety the first and most important criteria for student travel. Part II, which follows, discusses the ways which travel groups, chaperons and administrators can enhance travel safety after the choice of operator has been made. We urge you to review Part II carefully.

Remember the four most important steps you can take to ensure safe travel:

- **Understand and acknowledge the fact that not all motorcoach companies are equally safe.**
- **Don't chose a provider based on price alone.**
- **Turn to the experts for help. Insist on the adoption of an "approved carrier list" and demand that no travel takes place on unapproved carriers.**
- **Do the research. Review every carrier's safety qualifications ahead of individual travel**

needs.

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Finding the experts.

Below are listed a variety of available sites on the World Wide Web which can be of use to schools in the search for safe bus and motorcoach companies. Each web address is followed by a brief explanation of the services available from that website or the company which operates it.

FOR MOTORCOACH AND BUS COMPANY LISTINGS:

<http://www.uma.org>

United Motorcoach Association (UMA). The nation's largest professional association of commercial bus and motorcoach companies with approximately 1,000 member companies. The UMA website provides listings of member companies by state or by name and links to member company websites. The UMA also features a Motorcoach Consumer Guide and a direct link to federal carrier safety databases. UMA also fields questions about motorcoach services and issues through its e-mail links.

<http://www.buses.org>

American Bus Association (ABA). Also lists by state or name the commercial bus companies who are members of the ABA. The ABA website features travel and tourism destinations and information about events which highlight motorcoach travel group activities.

FOR BUS AND MOTORCOACH SAFETY INFORMATION

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov>

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). The FMCSA is responsible for the safety oversight and regulatory compliance of every commercial bus and truck entity in America. It also issues "interstate operating authority" to all for-hire passenger carriers (including van and limousines). The FMCSA enforces the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR) which are also available on the agency's website.

<http://www.safersys.org>

USDOT Safety Fitness Electronic Records System. Maintained under contract for the FMCSA, the "SAFER" system provides a more detailed profile of each commercial motor carrier which is regulated by the federal government. Records include data about the carrier's "safety rating," its record of accident and violations, its ownership and location, insurance coverage and a profile of

fleet size and employee numbers.

<http://ai.volpe.dot.gov>

USDOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center. The Volpe Center maintains more detailed motor carrier profile information, including a review of all of the points covered by FMCSA examiners when it visits and rates a motor carrier.

<http://www.mtmc.army.mil/content/504/approvedlist.pdf>

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC).

Thousands of military personnel travel officially by bus and motorcoach each year. To ensure the safety and comfort of those troops, MTMC has implemented the most thorough and well-maintained "pre-qualification" processes known to the passenger carrier industry. MTMC will not allow any company to officially transport military personnel until its own inspectors have conducted on-site visits. The MTMC inspections also review carriers for performance, reliability and responsiveness. Not all coach companies apply for the right to bid on military transport; those who do are given a rating by MTMC on a scale of 1 (the best) to 5 (the worst). Carriers rated from 1 to 3 are approved to bid on military work. A list of approved (bus) carriers is online at MTMC's website. The full ratings for each approved carrier will also soon be online. UMA strongly recommends a review of MTMC-approved carriers.

<http://www.mtmc.army.mil>

MTMC Homepage. Learn more about the military's carrier approval system and how motorcoach companies qualify to transport military personnel.

<http://www.uma.org/archives/busagree.pdf>

MTMC Military Bus Agreement. All carriers serving MTMC must sign and adhere to the conditions of this agreement in order to be added to the MTMC "approved carriers" list. It is one of the best examples of a pre-qualification process and agreements available. *Agreement online is current as of 12/07/01.*

FOR MOTORCOACH AND BUS COMPANY INSPECTIONS

Please note that the following entities are private businesses who are available to perform motor carrier safety "audit" and inspection as paid consultants.

<http://www.imcac.com>

International Motor Carrier Audit Commission (IMCAC), a commercial motor carrier safety performance review and inspection firm based in Northern Virginia. IMCAC offers online safety ratings based on "audited" and "verified" carrier data. Review the IMCAC process and information assembly procedure before reviewing carrier ratings.

<http://www.consolidatedsafety.com>

Consolidated Safety Services (CSS), based in Fairfax, VA, conducts motor carrier safety inspections and safety "audits" for the Department of Defense, Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC).

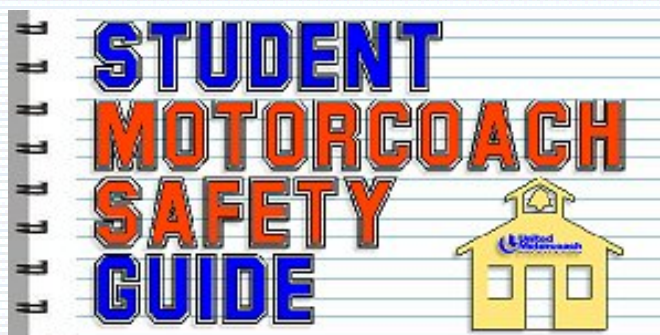
<http://www.safetyteam.com>

The Daecher Consulting Group, based outside Harrisburg, PA. The founder, Carmen Daecher, conducts safety audits, training and services for many commercial motorcoach and trucking concerns and has performed many motor carrier safety consulting contracts for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Mr. Daecher also serves as safety consultant to the United Motorcoach Association (UMA).

The UMA or your closest field office of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will be happy to assist you with any questions you may have about the safety record or operating policies of motorcoach companies in your area.

Enjoy your safe travel.

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Student Motorcoach Travel Safety Guide

PART II: ON THE ROAD

Introduction

Safe student travel by motorcoach is the product of a partnership. It starts with a motorcoach company that's dedicated to preparing the vehicle and the driver for incident-free transportation. After that, it's up to

the travel planners, school administrators, chaperons and the students themselves to ensure that the trip is as safe and pleasant as it can be. This part of the Student Motorcoach Travel Safety Guide addresses the all-important role of the traveling partner and many of the non-mechanical aspects of motorcoach services which student travel groups often find most mysterious.

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PLANNING YOUR TRIP.

The first step in any student travel happens long before anyone steps on board a motorcoach, but it's the very first and most important safety factor: the planning. Where do you want to go? How many people will make the trip? How far from home is the destination? Where and when will you stop? How long will you stay at the destination and what time do you expect to arrive or depart?

Many, if not most, student travelers leave "the details" to someone else. They select a starting day and an ending day, a destination and the size of the group and then leave it to others to "fill in the blanks." And very few travelers fail to add the caveat to "get it as cheap as you can." In terms of safety, that approach is a recipe for disaster. Let's address each element in the proper order of importance. We'll start with the issue of the cost of the trip because that's often the first criteria considered by student travel organizers.

COST-- There's no question that the price of transportation to and from your destination is important; it often comprises a third or more of the total travel budget, almost without regard to the mode of travel used: coach, air, rail or auto. Comparative cost is often the reason why travel groups turn to the motorcoach. Even after discarding the comfort and convenience advantages of a motorcoach, on a person-by-person basis, the coach represents a bargain. The problem is often those planners who try to stretch too far, to find "a bargain within a bargain."

Just as it is with so many consumer goods and services, individual motorcoach companies offer a wide range of quality and prices. Most often, the price difference between companies will reflect the company's use of new or older coaches, the availability of "extras" like videotape or DVD players, the cost of labor in your region of the country or the level of care and amenities offered by the company. But unlike most consumer goods or services, the price difference may also reflect a company's level of preparedness or its dedication to safe operations.

There are no "absolute" rules of motorcoach buying. There are no strong indicators that tell us that new coaches are safer than old ones; nothing to dictate that clean coaches with uniformed drivers are safer than dirty ones with drivers in tee-shirts. There is no rule -- written or unwritten -- that requires a safe coach to be an expensive coach or, conversely, that requires a cheap coach to be unsafe. But there are some common sense elements involved that link cost and safety. The first and most important is the fact that safety is expensive.

Safety-conscious operators invest heavily in maintaining a safe fleet. Whether they own their own garage or they contract repair and maintenance to reputable mechanics, safe operators achieve that status by investing virtually whatever it takes to ensure that every possible mechanical problem with their coach -- new or old -- is discovered and remedied before it takes to the road again. That doesn't mean that it can pass inspection once a year or once a month; most see to it that a competent mechanic inspects and repairs every coach before every trip. And it doesn't stop there. Every driver is charged with the responsibility to conduct a walk-around inspection of the vehicle before and after every day's travel, just as a pilot conducts a rigorous pre-flight exam of his aircraft.

Is it possible for a motorcoach company to be safe if they don't invest as much in preventative maintenance and professional repair? Of course it is, at least for a while. The professional motorcoaches on the roads today are extremely durable and forgiving vehicles. It's not at all unusual to find well-cared-for coaches with 20- and 30-year life spans still serving safely and comfortably. But the odds of breakdown increase dramatically when an operator scrimps on repairs or invests in the coach's appearance rather than its mechanical soundness. Statistically, very few mechanical problems on motorcoaches ever lead to crashes, but they do cause breakdowns, delays, missed schedules and hot tempers. The fact remains, though, that some repairs can't simply be put off.

Price alone is not a reliable indicator of safety. But a price quote that's significantly lower than the remaining field of competitors can and should be a strong indicator of the need for follow-up. If the same itinerary and trip information has been distributed to many competitors (to ensure that every company is presenting a price based on identical service and conditions), a price that's substantially lower than the remaining responses may indicate that the bidding company didn't fully understand your needs. It may also, however, indicate that some aspect of the low bidder's service is significantly different than the others. That aspect could be safety.

Don't buy on price alone.

ITINERARY AND DRIVER LIMITS-- Both the cost and the safety of your motorcoach travel can be affected by the schedule you intend to keep. That's why it's so important that you work closely with the motorcoach company to create a workable itinerary of highway travel, meal and rest stops and destination shuttle expectations.

Professional motorcoach drivers are limited by federal and state laws in the maximum number of hours that they can drive in any given work day and work week, and in the amount of time which must be allowed between work shift for rest. Refer to Part I of this Guide for an explanation of the federal "hours-of-service" regulations. Because of the limitations on total and driving hours, your travel schedule must stay within allowable and achievable limits, even if you already plan to use more than one driver. While it's okay to draft a list of places you want to visit and determine starting and ending dates, spend time with your selected motorcoach operator to firm up a "do-able" schedule.

The hours-of-service regulations are important to travel groups, not simply because they are your primary line of defense against accidents caused by driver fatigue or drowsiness, but because they should also figure closely into the schedule of driving, rest stops, overnights or driver changes that must be made for your trip. As a rule of thumb, a motorcoach driver can be expected to drive as much as 500-miles in the course of one workday if he's traveling on comparatively uncongested interstate highways. Local roads and traffic snarls will reduce that distance, of course, as average speed falls.

In most cases, a 15-hour total workday provides a good foundation for a very natural and comfortable travel day. The driver may spend an hour preparing for departure, four or more hours behind the wheel, an hour each for two meal breaks with the passengers and a final one to two hours at the day's destination dropping off passengers, parking and securing the vehicle and reaching his own accommodations.

At the end of the driver's 10-hours behind the wheel, regardless of where it falls in the 15-hour cycle, something has to happen.

- The first and best choice is always an overnight rest stop to allow both the driver and the passengers to refresh themselves for the next leg of your trip. Overnight stops should be scheduled as no less than nine to 10-hours on the passenger itinerary; remember the eight-hour break must not include the driver's pre- and post-trip duties.
- The second option is to have a second driver step in to continue travel when the first driver reaches 10-hours behind the wheel. The safest and most common way to exchange drivers, and the most cost-efficient way, is to have the second driver sent ahead to the staging point the previous day so that he or she will have at least eight full hours of rest at the staging point before stepping on-board.
- If the final destination is less than 15-hours' driving time from the starting point, a third option is available. Some travel groups carry a second driver on the coach right from the start. If that's your choice, remember that both drivers are "on the clock," right from the start, so the coach's total travel time can't exceed 15-hours. (Both are "on-duty" simultaneously. While one records "on-duty, driving," the second will be recording "on-duty, not driving" time.)

You and everyone on the coach need to understand that the hours-of-service rules for commercial drivers are virtually chiseled in stone. Violations of these rules can cost a driver and the motorcoach company fines ranging up to \$10,000 and they will jeopardize the driver and company's right to continue to stay in business. You also need to know that if a travel group, agent, escort, chaperon or anyone else uses pressure, coercion, threats, bribes or any other means to force the driver to operate the vehicle beyond his legal 10-hour driving limit, that other person can be prosecuted, as well. More importantly, by allowing or coercing a driver to exceed federal and state limits on hours-of-service, the safety of the travel group can be seriously jeopardized. The rules were created to protect passengers, drivers and those who share the road with commercial vehicles.

The time of day when your group travels can also be an important safety issue. Anyone who drives understands that fatigue is a natural occurrence, but it's a moving target. If your driving day consists of effort-free travel on uncongested highways, a longer driving day may be in order. If your hours behind the wheel are spent in slow, irritating, traffic, the hours feel longer. The time of day makes a difference in the comparative ease of driving. Still, many student travel groups plan late-day departures and all night travel using a driver change to allow the coach itself to be used as a "rolling motel."

Through-the-night travel isn't prohibited by any regulation, but safety risks increase with the practice. Even if the motorcoach driver is fresh, well-rested and alert, overnight driving exposes the vehicle to a much higher percentage of tired auto drivers who aren't governed by any regulation other than their own judgement. Driving at night is far more demanding and tedious than driving in daylight, even on the same roads, even for professional drivers and especially for the non-professionals who may be traveling the same highways.

It's also a fact of life that -- despite the comfort of today's luxury motorcoaches -- they simply are not the equivalent of a hotel or motel bed. Sleeping on board a moving vehicle isn't as restful for most travelers, and arriving at the destination early in the day is hardly a benefit if the travel group is too tired or too cranky to enjoy it. Often, the savings on hotel rooms at a midpoint stopover are wiped out by the added expense of salaries, advance placement travel and stay-over costs for the second driver, coupled with the leap-frog travel and stay-over costs of the first driver.

When you plan your travel itinerary, seriously consider starting earlier, travel primarily through daylight hours, include an overnight rest stop and, if needed, arrive at your destination fresh but a little later. Safety is your first concern. Using a healthy dose of common sense and realism in planning your trip can virtually assure a safe trip.

PLANNING STOPS -- Group travel by motorcoach requires an extraordinary level of logistics and advance preparation. That's one of the reasons why a good working partnership between travelers and travel professionals is critical. While a family of four can often leave their choices of restaurants, hotels or recreation to decisions of the moment, groups of 40 or 50 cannot. Many roadside restaurants simply aren't prepared to handle large travel groups without advance notice; the same applies to hotels and even parks. These advance planning elements play an important role in the safety of the trip; groups who fall behind a tight schedule run the risk of missing reservations or even failing to reach designated rest points before the driver is out of hours. That could leave the travel group miles from safe and restful accommodations.

Drivers are fully aware of the fact that they "serve many masters" during student trips, but their first master is safety, as defined by the law. If they reach the 10-hour driving mark while they're still miles from an appointed destination or stopover, they have no choice but to pull over and stop. By the same token, they are specifically prohibited from breaking traffic laws to make up time on behalf of a poorly-planned or tardy travel group. They can't be cajoled into speeding, running

traffic signals or following prohibited route short-cuts to make up for travel group timing errors. That's why it's critical to know -- well ahead of time -- where and when stops are planned and to plan plenty of flexible travel time around that schedule.

DISABLED TRAVELERS OR SPECIAL NEEDS -- Motorcoach travel today is the most versatile form of commercial group travel in the world, open, available, affordable and welcoming to virtually all travelers, including those with disabilities. Some advance planning provisions must be made, however, to accommodate persons with disabilities or special travel needs.

As a rule, you should notify the motorcoach company of the presence of disabled passengers as early in your travel planning as possible. While the availability of vehicles equipped with wheelchair lift devices is increasing daily, they are not yet universally placed or convenient. By law, a motorcoach company must provide an accessible vehicle at no additional cost if your request is made in advance. If the group includes a wheelchair-bound traveler who would rather be transferred to a motorcoach seat, the wheelchair may be stowed with baggage. You are also within your rights to request boarding assistance from the motorcoach company for a disabled traveler.

You should know that, although most motorcoaches are equipped with a lavatory, these are not accessible to disabled travelers who must use wheelchairs. As a result, you may wish during advance scheduling to plan slightly extended periods at rest stops to allow a disabled traveler to use accessible restrooms. Similarly, neither motorcoach companies or drivers are responsible for assisting disabled travelers with any portion of the trip other than boarding or disembarking from the coach. If a disabled traveler will require medical assistance or attendant aid during the trip, it is the responsibility of travel planners to provide that additional help. If a traveler will require interim medical attention or supplies (such as oxygen tank refills) during the course of travel, it is the responsibility of travel planners to place those stops or needs on the entire group itinerary. Remember, too, that one of the advantages of travel by motorcoach is their capability to reach virtually any destination in America that's served by a highway. Travel planners should check, in advance, to ensure that the attraction or destination can also accommodate disabled travelers.

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DURING THE TRIP

The safety partnership starts with good planning and should extend well into and throughout the student motorcoach travel. In most cases, the combined skills of the driver and the travel chaperons will ensure pleasant and safe travel. For this, the driver must be dedicated to operating his vehicle with his attention clearly focused on highway safety while the events and activities in the coach behind him are clearly in the control of chaperons and travel supervisors.

Unlike airline pilots who enjoy a separation of passenger compartment and cockpit to help them keep full

attention on the controls, motorcoach drivers are subject to distractions from the passengers themselves ranging from fights and parties to well-meaning conversation from over their shoulders. Chaperons and drivers must cooperate to ensure that the distractions don't overpower the safety focus of the travel.

STARTING YOUR TRAVEL-- Part I of this guide discusses the many safety aspects of company, vehicle and driver selection and preparation. In Appendix A of this Guide, schools and student motorcoach travel planners are encouraged to set in place a "pre-qualification" or company "approval" procedure conducted by qualified transportation specialists. Those mechanisms are designed to ensure that the coach and driver which pull up to your departure point are the safest possible at that moment. While a quick check of travel documents and a discussion of the day's travel plans may be appropriate at that time, a full re- inspection of the vehicle or a tedious review of the driver's qualifications are clearly inappropriate. Most student travel chaperons -- parents, teachers and school administrators -- are unfamiliar with commercial vehicle and driver standards and, as such, unprepared to judge either the mechanical fitness of the vehicle or the driver's qualifications. If there are safety issues or problems with the vehicle or driver which cause an immediate concern, the motorcoach company should be immediately notified and departure delayed until those concerns are addressed.

Because of the elements of schedule already mentioned, it's critical that travel start, end, and closely follow the times which were agreed upon at the planning stage. That means everyone knows for every stop where the pickup point will be and what time departure will take place. It also means that pre-determined lines of communication will be available if and when schedules are not met because of unforeseen delays. Most motorcoaches and drivers are provided with cell phones for use in emergencies; travel planners should clearly coordinate the "how" and "why" of communications ahead of departure and at each stage along the way.

Take time at the very outset of your travel, before the motorcoach is ever placed in gear, to familiarize yourself and the entire travel group with the amenities of the vehicle, with any safety equipment or procedures and with the motorcoach company's rules of operation. Most companies, for instance, adhere to strict prohibitions on smoking, drinking or gambling on board the vehicle. There are also often very stringent rules about who will be allowed access to videotape, DVD or music playback equipment which might be installed in the coach. You are reminded that the use of commercial movies, recordings of television programs and music may be subject to copyright restrictions and fees, due to the commercial nature of the coach itself. Ask your motorcoach operator about any copyright licenses or permits which may be in place to accommodate your onboard entertainment requests.

Most motorcoaches are equipped with overhead storage compartments -- some with closing doors -- and with lavatories which may be used while the coach is in operation. Specific rules and cautions may apply to the use of these facilities. The storage of items in the aisle of motorcoaches is specifically prohibited by federal law since the aisle is a primary path of escape in the case of an accident. Additionally, every commercial motorcoach is required to identify windows which may be used for escape in case of an accident. Roof hatches are also provided for emergency purposes.

It is both unlawful and dangerous to attempt to open most hatches or windows aboard most modern motorcoaches except in times of emergency when the coach is fully stopped. If you have questions about these facilities, ask the driver for specific instructions.

PASSENGER SAFETY -- There are no prohibitions against the movement of passengers from seat to seat, to the lavatory or through the aisles (other than the need to remain behind the white line marked in the floor of the coach behind the driver). Passengers should, however, be cautioned that they should remain in their seats whenever possible. If there is a need to walk through the aisles, they should ensure that they have a good, secure grip on seat backs and designated hand grips at all times to prevent loss of balance or to prevent injury in the event of a sudden stop. Walking or standing in the aisles should not take place in stop and go traffic circumstances or while the coach is traveling roads with many twists and turns.

Passengers should never attempt to enter or sleep in overhead storage compartments. Similarly, aisles should not be used for sleeping. Just as federal law requires the removal of any inanimate objects in the aisle of a motorcoach, so too should you prohibit the use of aisles for sleeping. In the case of an emergency, aisles must be clear for escape purposes.

Seatbelts are not required aboard any commercial motorcoach except for the driver. Both the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) -- the federal government's two leading highway safety agencies -- have found that the "compartmentalization" of passengers in bus and motorcoach seating areas, coupled with the physics of the vehicle's large size, serve best to protect passengers in the most common kinds of highway accidents. Some newer, European-made, motorcoaches may be equipped with belts at certain seating positions where passengers aren't compartmentalized (contained between their own seatback and a seatback ahead of them). These are usually the very front seats, a center-rear seat which faces the aisle or seats facing a table. If seat belts are available at those positions, passengers are urged to use them. A much more complete discussion of motorcoach seatbelt issues is available online at <http://www.uma.org/whybelt.txt>.

Before starting on your journey, ask your driver to explain any and all emergency procedures or company policies which may apply to that day's travel or the full journey. While the coach is in motion, chaperons will be expected to enforce those rules and to answer questions for the group while the driver concentrates on highway safety.

GROUP CONTROL AND BEHAVIOR -- An important element in safe motorcoach travel is often overlooked or under-emphasized by student travel planners: the control and behavior of the travel group itself.

The motorcoach company and driver have a single, most- important, responsibility to student travelers: to deliver the vehicle and passengers safely to their destination. That responsibility places them, practically and legally, in the role of "captain of the ship" during travel. They are not baby- sitters, school disciplinarians, police, chaperons or parents. At the conclusion of this section

of the Student Motorcoach Travel Safety Guide, you'll find a section called "[Rules for Schools](#)" which provides a basic set of behavior guidelines for student travel groups. Student travel planners are strongly urged to review and share these rules.

Drivers will do everything in their power to help with unexpected difficulties during student travel. They understand that individual needs must be met, that there are often stragglers, and that sometimes, "kids will be kids." But it's unfair to expect the driver to deal with the group's problems and to keep their concentration on the road and safety. That's where school administrators first, then travel chaperons, must bear the direct responsibility for group behavior. Chaperons must clearly be in control of the group. They should be plentiful enough to maintain order and control. And they should position themselves throughout the coach so that they can keep an eye on the entire group; carrying four chaperons, all of whom sit in the front of the coach where activities behind them are hidden, is an invitation for trouble. Anyone who has traveled with a family understands how distracting to the driver it can be to watch a disturbance in the rear-view mirror. Under most state laws, the driver is directly responsible for unlawful events which might occur aboard his coach (drinking, gambling, throwing items from windows, rowdiness). Drivers, just like airline pilots, are generally instructed to discontinue travel until they are satisfied that passengers are in control and following the rules.

Group planners and chaperons should have -- before departure -- a very clear policy and plan of action to deal with disciplinary problems whenever and wherever they occur during the trip. If a student must be returned home early, the responsibility for that return is not with the driver or the motorcoach company; nor is the notification of school administrators, parents or guardians when a problem occurs.

TRAVEL AND DRIVER OVERSIGHT -- Part I of this guide discusses the many safety aspects of company, vehicle and driver selection and preparation. In Appendix A of this Guide, schools and student motorcoach travel planners are encouraged to set in place a "pre-qualification" or company "approval" procedure conducted by qualified transportation specialists. Those mechanisms are designed to ensure that the coach and driver which pull up to your departure point are the safest possible at that moment. While a quick check of travel documents and a discussion of the day's travel plans may be appropriate at that time, a full re-inspection of the vehicle or a tedious review of the driver's qualifications are not called for. Most chaperons -- parents, teachers and school administrators -- are unqualified to judge the validity

After departure, student travel chaperons and administrators must also be ready to help keep the travel safe.

It is the responsibility of parents and chaperons during student motorcoach travel to care for and control the students themselves. It is not the responsibility of the parents and chaperons -- or the students -- to play the role of "back seat driver," armchair mechanic, traffic cop or critic. Certainly if a chaperon believes that there is something wrong with the vehicle, or the driver or if there is danger which the driver appears not to know about, to bring this to the driver's attention. These

instances, however, are extremely rare.

Each motorcoach travel group must identify the person in charge of that group to serve as the primary liaison to the driver during the course of travel. In addition, if multiple vehicles are being used, a chaperon on board each individual coach should be designated as the leader aboard that vehicle. If a driver has problems with any group participant, they should be resolved through the designated group or motorcoach leader.

If a chaperon believes that the driver or vehicle present an imminent hazard to safety, it is, of course, incumbent on the chaperon to act to discontinue travel until he or she is confident that travel may proceed without incident. In the true spirit of a safety partnership, disagreements between chaperons, group leaders and drivers should be resolved, whenever possible, in a fashion that fosters safety. There must be an open and free communication between both parties.

It is good practice for the travel group leader and the driver to plan a brief time at the conclusion of each day's travel to discuss the next day's schedule and expectations. That's also a good time to discuss any events of the current day's travel that might bear review or documentation.

DRIVER DUTIES AND PERSONAL TIME -- Professional motorcoach drivers must undergo very intensive, specialized training and preparation for their career. They are examined and certified for physical fitness at least once every two years. They must pass both written and skills testing to earn a commercial driver's license (CDL) before they may drive a motorcoach. Safe motorcoach driving is a highly skilled position which carries with it the "life and death" responsibilities of many persons. Except in rare instances, the driver is usually the only person aboard a coach who is both legally and professionally capable of performing that duty.

As such, it is both counterproductive and inappropriate to expect that the driver will carry out additional duties for the travel group. A driver, for instance, should be responsible for supervising the loading or unloading of baggage in storage compartments beneath the floor of the motorcoach, but he is not a bellhop or porter. The driver will not and should not be expected to carry baggage for passengers. Similarly, as we touched upon in our discussion of disabled travelers, the driver should not be expected to serve as attendant or care-giver for disabled passengers. Similarly, they should not be expected to act as arbitrators in passenger disputes or problems.

When travel has been completed for the day or during rest stops, drivers must first attend to the vehicle's needs, post-trip mechanical inspections and repairs if needed, refueling, parking, cleaning and securement, for example. The driver may only then turn to his personal needs and his mandatory rest periods. While it is certainly proper for a travel group who appreciates their driver to invite him or her to join them for meals or entertainment, such invitations are not required and, frequently, will not be accepted. Professional drivers learn that personal needs and rest must come ahead of social activities and many jealously guard their personal time during "off-duty" periods. If rest periods are long enough so that socialization with the travel group is possible and welcomed, drivers will often make the decision to join in if invited.

Travelers should understand that the fact that their generosity or kindness may not be accepted by the driver is not an indication of rejection but instead of the driver's own understanding of his needs to keep the travel safe. He, after all, is on the trip because he is at work.

Similarly, travel groups should make a diligent effort to allow the driver to use his or her free time however they may choose. For instance, passengers should avoid leaving items on board the motorcoach which they might want while staying at an overnight rest. It's often necessary for the driver to leave the motorcoach in a designated parking area which is extremely remote from hotels, casinos or other overnight accommodations. The retrieval of personal items during rest periods, then, is simply not possible.

If your travel requires the use of more than one motorcoach and overnight stops, it is preferred practice to provide each driver with a room of his or her own. It's important to remember that motorcoach drivers are adults and travel professionals who have, above all, earned private accommodations. It's also important to remember that drivers **must**, by law, dedicate their off-duty time to securing the rest they need to perform their job to the best of their ability. Sharing a room with others is, by nature, not conducive to undisturbed rest. While the cost of securing individual rooms may be marginally higher, the travel rewards returned are better-rested and better-natured drivers.

At the conclusion of the travel, a gratuity or "tip" is appropriate for drivers, even with student travel. As it is with waiters and most service employees, the amount of a gratuity is completely left to the discretion and satisfaction level of the travel group, but the standard service industry gratuity is 15-percent. A more common accepted benchmark for student travel groups is \$1 per passenger per day. The best and most successful motorcoach drivers work very hard beyond providing safe transportation to ensure that everyone aboard is comfortable and enjoying themselves, to the best of their ability to do so. They understand that your travel needs are important.

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AT THE END OF THE TRIP

When your student travel is concluded, it's a good time to "de-brief" with the driver, school administrators and travel planners, parents and the motorcoach company itself. Maintenance of good notes and records will help immensely when it comes time to assess the trip just ended. We recommend that no more than a day or two be allowed to lapse before completing both the discussions and/or any written reports that may be valuable. Using the "approved list" approach to pre-qualification of motorcoach companies, an assessment of good and bad points about the trip, the company and the driver may significantly affect the selection of a transportation provider for the next trip.

A variety of items should be covered during such an assessment. Was the schedule flexible enough to meet the travel needs; were layovers too long or too short; did the driver stay close to the designated arrival and departure times. Was the vehicle clean and ready for each day's trip? Was the driver well-prepared with directions and time requirements? Were there mechanical delays or equipment malfunctions on the coach? Was the driver helpful to chaperons and students? Would you use that motorcoach company and/or driver again?

From the motorcoach company's standpoint, it's also helpful to receive a response to the travel group. Was the group ready to travel at the appointed times? Were there discipline or communication problems? Were chaperons clearly in control and helpful in serving as group leaders? Were there inappropriate requests made on the driver's time or duties?

Virtually any and all aspects of the journey should be on the table for a free and open exchange during the discussions. Elements which need to be changed to improve the next travel group's enjoyment and safety should become part of the record with both school administrators and with the motorcoach company. Elements which shouldn't be changed should be noted as well.

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SUMMARY

Safe student motorcoach travel is the product of good planning, knowledgeable investigations, wise choices and common sense. We invite your questions and you comments at info@uma.org.

Rules for Schools

In order to make extracurricular activity trips as safe and pleasant as possible, the following guidelines are to be observed by school groups when using a commercial motorcoach or bus:

1. All decisions pertaining to the operation of the motorcoach will be made by the driver based on legal requirements and company policy.
2. It is the driver's determination when and where fuel stops shall be made in accordance with the company's policy.

3. The driver will determine where the bus may be safely stopped during emergencies on the road and where it may be parked at other times.
4. Allowing food and drinks inside the bus is a privilege granted by the motorcoach company and may be rescinded at the discretion of the driver. Should the driver determine that this privilege is being abused, all food and drink will be placed in the baggage area and passengers will have access during stops as needed. A clean-up and damage fee will be assessed if necessary.
5. Chaperons are responsible to see that students put trash in containers provided by the driver and if necessary pick up food and drink trash left by the students.
6. Deviation from the itinerary that was presented to the bus company may result in extra costs. Once the trip is in progress, additional itinerary changes may result in greater mileage costs or determined to be impossible if it conflicts with the legal duty time required by the driver.
7. Student behavior on the bus is the responsibility of the chaperons. Safety requirements determine that all passengers should be seated while the bus is in motion; it is the responsibility of the chaperons to see that this rule is enforced. If the chaperons cannot enforce this rule, the driver may park the bus and remain parked until it is enforced.
8. Commercial bus drivers are strictly regulated as to driving hours in order to comply with the legal requirements for safety. This requires close cooperation between the commercial bus company and the activity group to insure compliance.

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**This guide was created by the [United Motorcoach Association \(UMA\)](#),
113 South West Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. UMA may be reached by
e-mail at info@uma.org or by calling (703) 838-2929 or (800) 424-8262.**

We welcome your comments and questions.

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