

Should School Buses Have Seat Belts?



Last month, a school bus traveling along a Connecticut highway was cut off by a car. The school bus, which was carrying high school students, was forced off the side of the road and down an embankment. Many students were injured and one student was killed.

That terrible accident has caused people in Connecticut to give a lot of thought to school bus safety. Some lawmakers there hope to pass a law that will require seat belts on school buses. Six states already have school bus seat belt laws, and a dozen or more states try to pass such laws each year. Those attempts often fail.

Why have so many states failed to pass school bus seat belt laws? Many people think school buses are safe enough already. Buses are seven times safer than cars and light trucks, they say. High-backed seats on school buses are well padded and help to “package children like eggs.” And it would cost a lot of money to install seat belts on buses -- more than \$5,000 per bus. People who don't think seat belts are needed often point to the statistics: more than 42,000 people are killed each year in traffic accidents, but only six of those people are children on school buses.

NEWS WORD BOX

injuries require
embankment package
attempt statistics

Other people say seat belt laws are needed to protect young bus riders. They say that lap and shoulder belts reduce injuries by 45 percent. Seat belts can help improve students' behavior on buses, too. Installing seat belts on school buses is worth every penny of the cost, they add.

The governor of Connecticut agrees that seat belts are needed. “We need to do the right thing for our children,” said Governor Jodi Rell. When the state orders new buses from now on, those buses will have seat belts in them, she added.

MORE SCHOOL BUS STATISTICS

- Each year, 450,000 school buses travel roads and highways in the United States.
- Those school buses travel about 4.3 billion miles a year.
- About 23 million children ride buses to school or school events.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

How do you feel about seat belts on school buses?
Tell what you think and make a case for why you think that way.