

SHERIFF'S CORNER

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This month back-to-school safety is on our minds, and it is especially important in light of the recent tragic events in the metro area. While safety is always a priority, we want to share important back-to-school reminders for students, drivers and bike riders, as well as considerations for being safe and aware when around a school or educational facility.

For All Drivers:

- **Stop for flashing red lights and stop arms:** Minnesota law requires drivers on undivided roads to stop at least 20 feet from a school bus when its red lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended. This applies to traffic approaching the bus from both directions.
- **Exceptions on divided roads:** You are not required to stop if a physical barrier, such as a grassy median or concrete barrier, separates your lane from the bus's lane. However, staying alert and slowing down is still advised.
- **Violations:** Failure to stop can result in a fine of at least \$500. More severe criminal charges can apply for actions like passing on the right or if a child is injured or killed. Many Minnesota school buses are equipped with stop-arm cameras to enforce the law. We often get reports of stop arm violations and investigate and prosecute these violations.
- **Watch for pre-warning lights:** Yellow (amber) flashing lights are a pre-warning that the bus is about to stop. It is illegal to pass a bus on the right side once these lights are activated.

For students

- **At the bus stop:** Stand at least six feet, or three giant steps, back from the curb while waiting.
- **On the bus:** Find a seat quickly, stay in your seat while the bus is in motion, and speak quietly.
- **Getting on and off:** Wait for the bus driver to signal that it is safe to cross the street. When crossing, walk on the side of the road until you are 10 feet in front of the bus, ensuring you and the driver can see each other. Make eye contact with any motorists before stepping into the street.

For walkers

- **Use sidewalks and crosswalks:** Walk on sidewalks whenever possible. If there isn't one, walk facing traffic on the left side of the road, and cross streets only at crosswalks or intersections.
- **Crossing the street:** Stop at the curb, look left, right, and left again before crossing, and make eye contact with drivers to ensure they see you.
- **Stay visible:** When walking in the dark or in poor visibility, wear bright or reflective clothing.
- **Avoid distractions:** Put away phones and headphones to stay alert to your surroundings and traffic.

For bike riders

- **Wear a helmet:** Always wear a properly fitted bike helmet to protect against head injuries.
- **Follow traffic laws:** Ride with traffic on the right side of the road, obey all signs and signals, and be predictable by riding in a straight line.
- **Crossing streets:** Come to a complete stop before crossing and consider walking your bike across busy intersections.
- **Be visible:** Wear bright colors and use reflectors, as well as a white front light and a red rear light if riding in low light.
- **Avoid distractions:** Do not use phones or headphones while riding.

Driver and carpool safety

- **Be alert in school zones:** Slow down in neighborhoods and school zones, put away distractions, and be ready to stop for children crossing the street.
- **Follow drop-off procedures:** Adhere to your school's specific drop-off and pick-up rules and make eye contact with crossing children.
- **Carpool rules:** All passengers, including children, must wear seat belts. For younger kids, teach them to exit the vehicle on the curbside of the street.
- **Teen drivers:** Parents should model safe driving habits and set clear expectations for teen drivers, such as always wearing a seatbelt and avoiding distracted driving.

School building and facility safety

- Security measures: Many Minnesota schools have locked entrances, guest check-ins, and staff members patrolling hallways as part of standard security protocols.
- Emergency drills: Students participate in lockdown and fire drills as part of the "Standard Response Protocol," which teaches them how to respond in an emergency.
- Staying vigilant: School officials and police encourage everyone to be vigilant. Report suspicious objects or behavior by calling 911.
- Enhanced police presence: You will continue to see Cass County law enforcement agencies increasing patrols around schools and places of worship as an extra safety precaution.

School is more than a place of learning — it's where our future leaders grow. Let's work together to ensure every child arrives safely and returns home safely each day. On behalf of all of us at the Cass County Sheriff's Office — we wish our students, teachers, and families a safe and successful school year!

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in this column or in person, please feel free to contact me anytime using one of the following methods:

Email:

bryan.welk@casscountymn.gov

Phone:

218-547-1424 | 1-800-450-2677

By Mail/In Person:

Cass County Sheriff's Office

303 Minnesota Ave W

PO Box 1119

Walker MN 56484

