

GENERAL NEWS

Bus safety a priority for schools

Although many school teachers and their students are enjoying the summer vacation, Nicholas County Transportation Director Phillip Coldiron and his crew of maintenance specialists are working every day to ensure that Nicholas County students will be transported safely to and from their homes, their classrooms and all school related activities this coming school year.

"Safety is our number one priority," Coldiron said last week as he continued to inventory parts, check the maintenance status of various buses and double check all the proper inspection forms and other paperwork which accompanies all aspects of his job. "The vehicles are inspected prior to each use. There is a shocking amount of paperwork involved in our business."

Those inspections are part of the overall guidelines which school systems are forced to adhere to each year through the state's minimum specification requirements.

The 2007 Kentucky Minimum Specifications For School Buses policy was developed through the cooperative efforts of the State School Bus Specifications Revision Committee, which is composed of local district superintendents, transportation supervisors, driver training instructors and bus maintenance technicians.

Representatives of the manufacturers of school bus chassis and bodies provided technical assistance.

"We send inspections in every month to the state," Coldiron said. Dennis Jackson, the mechanic and I both oversee the inspections. These are done regardless if it's a substitute bus or a normal bus we use every day."

"We never know when we may have to use one of our substitute buses, and we make sure they are always ready."

The specifications enforced by the state for each of Kentucky's school systems cover all the bus components, from the tires to the roof compartment and everything in between.

Coldiron and Superintendent of Nicholas County Schools Greg Reid said that safety issues and concerns for school buses have intensified in the last decade.

"Ever since the Carrollton bus tragedy several years ago the specifications and safety issues have been concerns for everyone," Reid said.

"We've followed the guidelines of the state and we've taken action ourselves to make our buses safer. We upgraded seven or eight years ago from gasoline to diesel. Mr. Coldiron does a good job and we are proud of everyone that helps transport our children safely back and forth from school and school activities. Safety is an ongoing process and it is our number one priority."

Coldiron elaborated. "Brakes and tires are our main concern," Coldiron said of the bus components he replaces on a regular basis to ensure safety. "We never put a used tire on a retread on the front of our buses and we replace our tires when they have minimum tread wear. Our buses travel approximately 300,000 miles each year."

According to Coldiron and Jackson, if a bus hauls one child 10 feet it has to be inspected.

Jackson said keeping the inspections up to date, especially the paperwork that accompanied the inspections, was a challenge. Gary Souder, Jimmy Sidles, Ricky McFarland and Jimmy Price are the maintenance personnel who assist Jackson and Coldiron each day.

They also work on all of the other school vehicles and motorized equipment, including three riding lawn

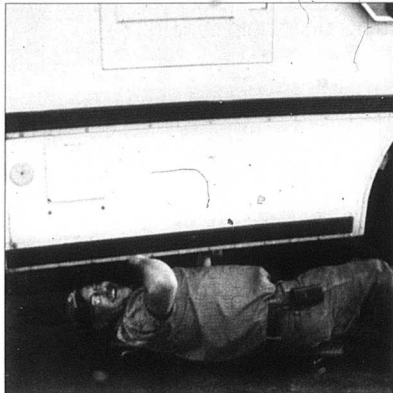
mowers, a forklift and a bucket truck. The Nicholas County School System employs 17 full-time bus drivers and five-part-time substitute drivers. "We have a very experienced group of drivers," Coldiron said.

Bus drivers must pass a commercial drivers license physical each year, and they are subject to urinalysis tests throughout the year. "We have an independent company that does random urinalysis at least four times a year," Coldiron said. Coldiron is also respon-

sible for making the call on snowy days to see if it is safe to operate the buses over the road system across Nicholas County. "I'll start driving at about two that morning," Coldiron said. "I'll drive across the whole county because the roads might be all right on

one end of the county, but be hazardous on another section." Coldiron says he doesn't hesitate to call off the school day if the roads are unsafe. "We don't take chances with children," he said matter-of-factly. Buses are also outfitted

with video cameras that record all the activity on the bus roof. "It can be very beneficial if there is a question of discipline or if the bus driver reports a problem with any student behavior," Coldiron said.



Photos by Charles Mattox
Dennis Jackson, left, and Phillip Coldiron work diligently to make certain buses are in top shape.





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