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MARYLAND DRIVERS REDUCE SCHOOL BUS STOP ARM VIOLATIONS, MSDE FINDS

One-Day Survey by Drivers Shows Big Dip, More Work to be Done

BALTIMORE (August 25, 2015) – Drivers are paying greater attention to the stop arms on school buses, a new Maryland State Department of Education-sponsored survey has found.

Stop arms swing out from a bus and lights flash whenever it is making an on-roadway student pick-up. A total of 2,796 violations of school bus stop arms were recorded on a single day last spring. Although still a significant number, the rate was down by more than 700 from the 3,505 violations witnessed last year, and less than half the number of violations recorded in 2011, the survey's first year.

“Maryland schools are opening, and we ask that all drivers focus on the safety of our students. It is illegal to pass a bus with its stop arm extended and its lights flashing,” said State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery. “We celebrate that progress that has been made since our bus drivers first launched this survey five year ago. But we have more work to do for the safety of our students.”

MSDE coordinated the survey in April along with school transportation directors in all 24 school systems. It is considered a snapshot of illegal activity on the roads. Eighty-two percent of Maryland school bus drivers took part in the survey.

Violations have been declining steadily since the survey was launched, before rising slightly last year. Bus drivers witnessed 7,011 violations in 2011, a number that fell dipped below 3,000 this year. School systems and bus drivers have been raising awareness about stop arm violations for the past four years.

Large systems with more buses and bus routes noted the most violators. Montgomery County school bus drivers tallied the most – 883 drivers ignoring the stop arm – but that was down from 1,494 in 2012. Prince George's County dropped from 669 to 230 over the past year, while Baltimore City dropped increased from 428 to 224 and Baltimore County fell from 410 to 269. Anne Arundel, Cecil, Charles, Howard, and Worcester say increases. Drivers in one small county – Talbot – did not witness, while Kent and Somerset found one each and Dorchester tallied two.

The survey was undertaken at the behest of a number of members of the Maryland General Assembly, which has been monitoring school bus safety. The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services is coordinating surveys of this type in all 50 States.

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