



Bus Safety 101

A Comprehensive Curriculum
to Training Bus Operators



The average cost of a non-fatal bus accident for a company is \$195,258. If there's a fatality, it will usually cost a company \$1.5 million or more. It's the industry with the most expensive accidents.

The fact is, every bus you put on the road is a financial timebomb. Your operators are carrying dozens of passengers and sharing the road with hundreds of motorists. An accident means lawsuits, lost resources, court fees and more.

If your company hasn't had a serious accident yet, that doesn't mean you're off the hook. It might just mean you're lucky. Without taking proper precautions, your operators will eventually cause a serious accident. It's only a matter of time.

There's good news, though. Accidents don't have to happen. You can educate and train your operators to reduce risk and prevent accidents. This will make you more efficient, save your company money, and save lives.

We'll show you how.



What Causes Accidents?

Not only are accidents so expensive, but they're common.

Look at it this way. For every 1,000 miles driven, the average person has a 1 out of 336 chance of being in an accident. Your drivers are on the road much more than the average person. That means their risk of a collision is higher. And of course, the more employees you have on the road, the greater the chances your company will deal with a serious accident.

If accidents are both common and expensive, you have a great incentive to try to reduce accidents at your company. Luckily, this is entirely possible, and it starts with understanding what accidents are and why they happen.



Let's begin with some basic concepts.

What is Safety?

Safety is freedom from risk. The less risk there is, the safer you are.

What is Risk?

Risk is the possibility of suffering harm or loss. It's risky to gamble because you could lose all your money. It's risky to drive under the influence of alcohol because you could get in a serious accident, perhaps ending your life or someone else's.

The problem is, we're never completely safe because we're never entirely free from risk. Risk is all around us. There's risk while you're driving, while you're at the grocery store, and even just while you're sitting at home.

So what should we do? Admit defeat and say we can never be safe? Of course not. We might never be 100% safe, but we can become safer. That brings us to our next few questions.



Where does risk come from?

Risk comes from unsafe conditions and unsafe behaviors. Unsafe conditions like poor road conditions or a vehicle that is in need of repair increase your risk. Similarly, unsafe behaviors like driving above the speed limit, following someone too closely, and backing a commercial vehicle without a spotter increase risk.

How can we reduce risk?

We can reduce risk by avoiding or eliminating unsafe conditions and reducing unsafe behaviors. If there's a giant snowstorm, you can avoid risk by not driving. If you want your vehicle to be able to stop in time, you can eliminate the risk of skidding out by checking your tire tread every day. If you want to prevent a rear end collision, you can reduce your risk by maintaining a safe following distance.

What happens if we don't reduce risk?

If we fail to avoid or eliminate unsafe conditions, and we fail to reduce unsafe behaviors, we have accidents.

What are accidents?

Just like with safety and risk, we have a specific definition for accidents. An accident is:

- ✓ An unplanned event . . .
- ✓ That involves or affects people . . .
- ✓ That disrupts activity . . .
- ✓ And has a cause

That last part of the definition is very important. Accidents are caused, and they're caused by people and their unsafe behaviors. Snowstorms increase risk, but on their own, they don't cause accidents. It takes people. Now, this is not about blame. It's about prevention. If accidents are caused by unsafe behaviors, that means we can prevent accidents by removing unsafe behaviors.

How Can Your Operators Learn to Be Safer?

Accidents happen for two reasons: ignorance and bad choices.

The first one, ignorance, doesn't mean stupidity. It just means someone didn't know any better. They didn't know effective defensive driving principles, or the steps to a proper pre-trip inspection, or the correct following distance for their type of vehicle. Ignorance can be corrected via education and training, which we'll cover shortly.

The second reason, a bad choice, is more difficult to influence. A bad choice means someone knew they were doing the wrong thing and decided to do it anyway. They balanced the risk of an accident with a reward, such as getting to work on time, not having to wait to send a text message, or saving time and energy by skipping their pre-trip inspection.



If someone is willing to risk an accident to save time or energy, you can't change that. These are people you don't want behind the wheel for your company.

We'll focus our energy in this ebook on how to reduce unsafe behaviors via education and training.

Your Operators Aren't Prepared to Prevent Accidents

Like we said earlier, accidents can be prevented if you can reduce your drivers' unsafe behaviors. You can't do that without proper education and training.

The CDL exam, on its own, does little to prepare a new driver to reduce risk, prevent accidents, and make up for the mistakes of all the other amateurs out on the road.

You need to invest in proper tools, resources, and processes to educate and train your drivers to prevent accidents.



Education, Training, & Creating Safer Operators

We've mentioned several times now "education" and "training". You might not have stopped to consider that they're quite different.

Education and training serve distinct purposes in developing your employees. Education is how you teach your employees knowledge and training is how you teach your employees skills.



Knowledge is defined as concepts, principles, information, and ideas that you commit to memory for later purposes. When it comes to driving, knowledge includes things such as:

- ✓ Traffic laws
- ✓ Defensive driving principles
- ✓ The necessary tread depth for tires
- ✓ How much following distance you need for your vehicle type

To educate your drivers, you can use tools such as online lessons, guides, activities, exams, etc.

Skills, simply put, are “how to do things”, and they always have a physical component. Driving skills includes things such as:

- ✓ how to perform a safe turn
- ✓ how to properly shift
- ✓ how to check your tires’ tread depth
- ✓ how to calculate your following distance

You can’t teach skills without some hands-on training. Your drivers won’t learn these skills if you don’t do closed course exercises and behind the wheel training.



What to Include in Your Bus Operator Training Program

We finally get to what you came for. Thanks for the patience with everything above, but it's all essential. You can't reduce accidents and injuries without knowing what accidents are, why they happen, and how people learn.

As we've pointed out, there's a difference between education and training. Education happens from lessons, guides, and instruction. Training only happens with hands-on learning. That being said, when folks mention a "bus operator training program", they're talking about all of the above.

With that in mind, we're going to share with you essential topics to cover in three different categories:

- ✓ Topics for online self-directed learning
- ✓ Topics for hands-on training
- ✓ Topics for on-going learning



What to Teach Your Operators Via Online Education

Online, self-directed education is crucial to an effective bus operator training curriculum. With online education, you will:

- ✓ Create a unified message and learning points
- ✓ Save time and money otherwise spent sitting in a classroom
- ✓ Achieve better learning outcomes

We highly recommend you implement a professionally-produced off the shelf program for your online safety education needs. You can use this both with your new hires and on-going education.

Here are three defensive driving topics that every busing company needs to teach:



Following Distance -rear-end collisions are the most common accident for bus operators. They're extremely costly as well, considering how large your operators' vehicles are. The kicker is that they're so easy to prevent. You just need to educate your operators on how to leave room in front of them.



Navigating Intersections -intersections are the most dangerous driving environment your operators face. 40% of accidents happen in or around intersections. You need to educate your operators on these risks and how to avoid them.



Backing-your operators spend less than 5% of miles driven in reverse. Even so, for most companies, backing accidents account for about 20% of accidents. This means backing is dangerous. Use online education to teach your operators how to avoid backing in the first place and how to back safely when necessary

We mentioned above that we recommend going with an off-the-shelf program to cover these. That's because making them yourself will actually cost you more money for worse results.

You have several options out there, but of course we like ours:

[The Bus Safety Course.](#)

Our clients on The Bus Safety Course benefit from:

- ✓ A minimum 20% reduction in accidents & injuries
- ✓ Their own online portal to host our program and any third-party training for no additional cost
- ✓ Reductions in cost of loss that are much more than they spend

You can try it for free on our website:

<https://www.avatarfleet.com/bus-safety-course>



What to Teach Your Operators Via Hands-on Training

Education is the cornerstone of your bus operator training program, but on its own, you won't achieve your goals. Your operators can't learn how to be safe, defensive drivers without some hands-on training.

We highly recommend you put all new-hires through closed course exercises. These could include:

- ✓ Judgment stop
- ✓ Blind-side and sight-side backing
- ✓ Left turns
- ✓ Right turns

Additionally, we recommend you put all new-hires through some amount of behind-the-wheel training with one of your driving instructors. Your instructors should evaluate the person's ability to:

- ✓ Maintain a safe speed
- ✓ Maintain a safe following distance
- ✓ Safely change lanes, merge, and pass
- ✓ Identify hazards
- ✓ Navigate intersections
- ✓ Prevent accidents with pedestrians & cyclists

By the way, when we say new-hires, we mean everyone you hire. Sure, someone with experience needs less training and evaluation than a newbie, but don't roll the dice on safety. Just because someone hasn't had an accident doesn't mean they won't cause an accident for you.

What to Re-Teach Your Operators

New-hire education and training is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your accidents and injuries. The second most important thing you can do is retrain your current operators.

Think of it this way. Do you remember how to solve an algebraic expression for two variables? Do you remember the steps to the scientific method? Do you recall any of the themes from *The Great Gatsby*?

These are all things most of us learn our freshman year of high school, but decades or even just years later, we don't remember anything. If you don't use it, you lose it. It works the same way with driving.



You can teach your operators everything you want them to do, but without retraining and evaluations, they won't use it and they'll forget about it months or even weeks later.



It's crucial to put your operators through online lessons again that they took as new-hires. We recommend having your operators take online education once a month.

Additionally, you need to retrain your operators on behind the wheel driving and closed course exercise. Do each one at least once a year.

So, how do you know what to focus on? It depends on your company. You need to ensure you cover your most common and costly accidents in operator retraining. For most companies, that includes the following:

- ✓ Maintaining a safe following distance
- ✓ Performing safe turns
- ✓ Backing
- ✓ Changing lanes, merging & passing
- ✓ Navigating intersections
- ✓ Pedestrian & Cyclist awareness



Take Action BEFORE You Have an Accident

All too often we have companies who call us after they have an accident. They just spent \$500,000 on cost of loss and someone got hurt so they want to ensure it never happens again. That's all well and good, but if they would have called us a week ago, we would have saved them all that loss.

Don't let that be you.

If you need help reducing accidents, injuries, and cost of loss, please call us. If we can help, we will. If we can't help, we'll be the first to say it.

Take action before it's too late.



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