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 **Life Motor News**

# Why school bus and driver safety has to be a major priority for us all

Big clampdown coincides with academic year activity, our Road Safety Authority expert reveals



School bus

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Since 2015, the enforcement unit of the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has increased its targeting of the bus sector to make sure operators are putting safe drivers and roadworthy vehicles on the road.

There is an emphasis on activity around the academic year, when schools, clubs and voluntary organisations hire buses for extracurricular activities.

The strategy is to target vehicles and companies considered to be of highest risk. How do we do that? By monitoring the results of the annual NCT for buses and trucks, conducting roadside inspections and carrying out inspections at operators' properties.

In 2016, 1,207 buses were inspected by RSA enforcement officers at the roadside - half had defects. One-in-five of these had major faults.

Of the 1,028 school bus operators' premises we visited to check their maintenance systems, during 2016, just under half met legal requirements on first visit. This rose to two-thirds on our second visit.

We conducted inspections of 527 buses since the start of the 2017/18 school year. A total of 283 buses were found to be defective - 21 dangerously so and 149 had major defects.

The major defects spanned tyres, anti-lock braking system and poor condition/broken brake lights.

As a result, 143 buses were required to be repaired, while 25 had to undergo a new Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test. A total of 16 buses were taken off the road or returned to base immediately, while nine were repaired there and then.

The poor picture this paints is largely due to increased targeting of operators that pose the highest risk to road safety, rather than a reflection of a deterioration in the national bus fleet.

That said, it is simply unacceptable that a bus operator transporting passengers, especially children, would use a vehicle not in a roadworthy condition.

Enforcement activity will continue to be heavily focused on bus operators transporting of children.

The RSA has passed on these results to all the relevant state agencies or met to inform them of our findings. We have worked with them to find ways of strengthening systems to ensure, for example, that operators working in the School Transport Scheme are meeting all their legal obligations.

We have asked that the need to comply with legislation be strengthened in all school bus operator contracts. This has been adopted for all new contracts over the past two years.

Technology and data are also being used to support a more targeted approach. Since 2015, buses with expired Certificates of Roadworthiness (CRW) were added to the watch lists on the Garda Automatic Number Plate Recognition system.

There are a number of other measures in the pipeline to support more effective enforcement, including a roadside fixed-charge penalty for not having a CRW. Our officers also have a smartphone app to them identify higher-risk operators while ensuring compliant operators are not pulled over at the roadside.

We have also spread the message among clubs, voluntary organisations and schools hiring buses for extracurricular events. There is a role for voluntary workers in youth and sporting clubs, parents and teachers, to ensure the bus company they hire confirms in writing that they are providing safe and legal transport services.

To help, the RSA has compiled a useful one-page Declaration of Compliance form which outlines a checklist of minimum legal requirements.

This can be downloaded and printed from [www.cvrt.ie](http://www.cvrt.ie).

**Ad** [Bus Combo tickets from Dublin City Centre to the Fairyhouse Easter Festival now available](#)

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