

Back-to-School Traffic and Pedestrian Safety for Workers



The beginning of the school year changes traffic patterns in ways that can create new risks for workers, students, parents, contractors, delivery drivers, and members of the public. Roads that were relatively quiet during the summer may suddenly become congested with school buses, bicycles, pedestrians, passenger vehicles, delivery trucks, and employees arriving for work at the same time.

For OHS managers, HR directors, and school administration and staff, back-to-school season is a good opportunity to review traffic and pedestrian controls, particularly at workplaces located in or near schools, childcare centres, community facilities, and residential neighbourhoods. Even workplaces that are not directly connected to a school may experience heavier traffic during morning and afternoon commuting periods.

Why Traffic Risks Increase During the School Season

School-day traffic is often concentrated into relatively short windows. Morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up can create sudden congestion, impatient drivers, double parking, unexpected U-turns, and vehicles stopping in areas that are normally clear.

At the same time, children may be walking, cycling, running across parking lots, exiting vehicles unexpectedly, or travelling in groups. Younger children can be difficult for drivers and equipment operators to see, particularly around parked vehicles, buses, trucks, landscaping, or other visual obstructions.

School buses add another layer of complexity. They may stop frequently, block sightlines, and create temporary changes in traffic flow. Workers who drive for their jobs should be reminded that school-zone speed limits, bus-stopping requirements, crossing guards, and other traffic controls must be followed carefully.

Employers should also consider seasonal changes outside regular school hours. After-school programs, sports practices, clubs, parent meetings, evening events, and community programs can keep school grounds active well beyond the traditional school day.

What Workers at Schools Should Look Out For

Employees working at schools or nearby facilities should pay particular attention to areas where vehicles and pedestrians interact. Parking lots, loading zones, bus loops, entrances, sidewalks, maintenance yards, and delivery areas can all become higher-risk locations during busy periods.

Workers should watch for children stepping out from between parked vehicles, parents stopping in unauthorized areas, bicycles crossing vehicle routes, and drivers who may be distracted while looking for parking or watching for their children.

Visibility is especially important. Overgrown vegetation, snowbanks later in the season, temporary signage, dumpsters,

parked service vehicles, and construction materials can interfere with sightlines. Employers should regularly inspect traffic routes and remove or control obstructions wherever possible.

Maintenance and custodial employees may face additional risks when performing outdoor work during arrival or dismissal times. Tasks such as waste collection, groundskeeping, snow removal, maintenance, and equipment movement should be scheduled away from peak pedestrian activity whenever practical.

Protecting Students and Parents During School Hours

A strong traffic management plan should clearly separate pedestrians from moving vehicles wherever possible. Marked walkways, barriers, designated crossings, directional signs, cones, and controlled vehicle routes can help reduce unpredictable interactions.

Schools and other employers should also clearly identify appropriate drop-off, pick-up, delivery, and staff parking areas. When these zones are poorly defined, drivers may create their own routes, increasing the likelihood of conflict between vehicles and pedestrians.

Communication is also important. Staff, contractors, and regular delivery drivers should understand the site's traffic procedures, including restricted areas and busy periods. Where necessary, workers directing traffic should receive appropriate instruction and wear high-visibility clothing so they can be easily identified.

Employees should never assume that a child has seen an approaching vehicle. Drivers should reduce speed, eliminate distractions, use mirrors carefully, and be prepared for

unexpected pedestrian movement.

Do Not Forget After-Hours Risks

Traffic safety planning should extend beyond the final school bell. Schools may remain busy into the evening with sports, recreation programs, childcare, performances, meetings, and community events.

Lighting becomes particularly important as daylight hours shorten. Parking lots, pedestrian routes, entrances, stairways, and crossings should be adequately illuminated. Burned-out lights and poorly lit areas should be reported and corrected promptly.

After-hours workers should also be aware that normal traffic controls may change. Gates may be closed, entrances may be redirected, or visitors unfamiliar with the site may park in unexpected areas. Contractors and maintenance staff working around vehicles should continue to use appropriate visibility measures and maintain clear pedestrian routes.

Make Back-to-School Safety Part of Seasonal Planning

Back-to-school traffic hazards are predictable, which means employers can prepare for them. Before each school year, OHS managers and supervisors should review traffic patterns, pedestrian routes, signage, lighting, parking arrangements, and previous near misses or complaints.

A short seasonal reminder to employees can also reinforce expectations around speed, distraction, reversing, pedestrian awareness, and vehicle-pedestrian separation.

The safest approach is to assume that traffic around schools will be unpredictable. By slowing vehicles down, improving

visibility, separating people from traffic, and reviewing conditions throughout the school year, employers can help protect workers, students, parents, and visitors during some of the busiest periods of the day.