

SAFETY COMES FIRST FOR FAITH-BASED GROUP TRAVEL: WHY YOU SHOULD *LOOK BEFORE YOU BOOK* OR CHARTER A BUS

Bus travel, overall, is both safe and cost effective. That makes booking a tour or chartering a bus an attractive option for faith-based group travel. When planning a group trip, compelling destinations and activities that promote fellowship are important. But safety should always be your top priority: every trip planner, minister, or church activity director should learn about bus safety, and if appropriate, research bus company safety records and driver qualifications before finalizing travel plans.

If You Plan to Use Your Own Bus or Other Vehicle...

Many churches and faith-based organizations have their own buses, mini-buses, vans, or other passenger vehicles used for local events and programs. If your trip crosses state lines, your vehicle will be subject to important safety regulations – and your drivers will have restrictions on how long they can drive, to prevent impairment from fatigue. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) offers a brochure to help private passenger-carrying vehicles travel safely and in compliance with federal requirements, at: <https://cms.fmcsa.dot.gov/sites/fmcsa.dot.gov/files/docs/brochure-PMCPs.pdf>.

Bus Companies With Poor Safety Records Pose a Greater Crash Risk

Even one bus crash is too many – particularly if it injures or takes the lives of passengers. Unfortunately, every year bus crashes result in injuries or death. While road conditions and unsafe drivers in other vehicles contribute to many crashes, there is also a correlation between a bus company's safety record and its likelihood of being involved in a crash.

FMCSA lets you search bus safety information online – or with a convenient mobile app. Visit www.fmcsa.dot.gov/lookbeforeyoubook to access these tools.

Make sure the company is authorized to operate. Then review the safety information provided to see how the company compares with other bus companies for important safety issues – from maintenance of the bus and its safety equipment, to safe driving, to its safety rating.

Qualified Drivers are Vital to Safety

Driving a bus requires special skills and experience. Talk to the bus company to ensure any driver assigned to your trip has a current Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and current medical certification. The company should also have and enforce driver safety policies – including a proactive drug and alcohol testing program, and prohibiting texting or using hand-held cell phones while driving.

Operating While Fatigued is a Major Crash Risk

Driving while impaired from fatigue is a significant factor in many bus crashes. The bus company and driver both have a responsibility to avoid the dangers of driving while fatigued. By law, a commercial bus driver cannot:

- Drive more than 10 consecutive hours (following 8 consecutive hours off duty);
- Drive after 15 consecutive hours on duty (including driving and other time “on the clock” for loading, unloading, etc.); or
- Drive at all after reaching maximum workweek hours of service.

If your group has a longer-distance trip, or even a shorter trip that spans many hours, your trip may require a qualified backup driver.

Build Safety Into Your Trip Planning!

Add a margin of safety in planning your trip – allow extra time for traffic, detours, or other unexpected delays. Never ask your driver to speed – or to make unscheduled stops that could extend driving time illegally. And consider having one or more assigned “safety officers” onboard to help ensure travelers are mindful of safety, and to assist in the event of an emergency.

Finally, visit www.fmcsa.dot.gov/lookbeforeyoubook to learn more and access safety resources and tools.

LOOK BEFORE **YOU BOOK**