



Media Release

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STEO Prepared for Inclement Weather

(Johnstown) –With winter near, and the impending onset of inclement weather, Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario (STEO) is preparing the process used to manage bus cancellations for the upcoming winter season.

“STEO has worked vigorously to improve communication with parents and students about decisions to cancel busing if snowy conditions or icy roads make it unsafe to run buses,” said Ron Cotnam, STEO’s General Manager and Chief Administrative Officer.

Letters have been sent to all parents of students in both the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario and the Upper Canada District School Board, explaining the process for issuing bus cancellation orders. STEO’s website offers easy access to transportation updates during inclement weather season and also provides a video that explains the bus cancellation process. While STEO still works with area radio and TV stations to issue details about cancellations, the website means parents don’t have to wait for the next newscast to get details. They can log on at www.steo.ca to access information.

“The decision to cancel busing is not taken lightly,” explained Mr. Cotnam. “It’s based on careful analysis of several factors, from up-to-date weather forecasts, to information from bus drivers who check roads on mornings when problem weather is expected.”

STEO staff review forecasts each day before 2:00 p.m. to check for weather alerts that may affect busing. If there are problems on the horizon, bus contractors are notified. Forecasts are reviewed again at 9:30 p.m.

On the mornings that snow storms, freezing rain, or other weather problems are expected, the forecasting service, Pelmorex/The Weather Network, is contacted at 4:30 a.m. to check on weather conditions. Pelmorex/The Weather Network is one of the most accurate forecasting services in the country. The same system is used by road crews from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation.

STEO staff members do not rely solely on forecasts, however, when deciding whether or not to cancel bus service.

Consultation takes place with a team of contractors whose staff members check area roads at 4:30 a.m. if bad weather is expected. The region is separated into 18 zones with a contractor as a captain in each zone. The captain reports weather and road conditions to Cotnam directly, confirming the amount of snow and ice accumulation on roads, if snow or freezing rain is continuing, and providing details on accumulation and intensity. STEO, and the contractors, also consult with municipal road crews, police, and other school boards throughout the region, before making the call.

With such a large area, it's not unusual for weather to be bad in some parts of the jurisdiction, and not others. In those situations the Board only cancels busing in problem areas, or areas where weather is expected to pose difficulty for bus drivers by the time they pick up students for the return trip home. This means buses can be cancelled in all 18 zones, or cancelled in as few as one, when conditions warrant such an order. Parents may get frustrated if roads in their area look fine, but while one street may look clear, travel elsewhere in the immediate region may be dangerous.

The final decision on bus cancellations is made by the Director of Education from each board, or his designate, based on Cotnam's recommendations. The decision to cancel must be made by 5:45 a.m., as buses begin as early as 6:00 a.m.

"We understand that cancelling buses in bad weather has a big effect on families, and we know that students are best served in the classroom," said Cotnam. "Parents must understand though that we care about our students and their safety is our top priority, so there are times we simply must cancel busing to keep them safe."

Once the decision is made to run, STEO cannot reverse it, even if weather takes an unexpected turn for the worse. Parents rely on that decision when they leave for work.

Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario operates approximately 750 school vehicles, which transport approximately 32,000 students across districts in Eastern Ontario.

For more information, please call:

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