

Fire Drills and School Bus Evacuations

24 P.S. §§ 15-1517, 15-1518

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this BEC is to outline the requirements of public school entities to conduct fire drills and emergency school bus evacuation drills and to set forth a process for the reporting of those drills to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). BECs provide guidance and do not establish binding norms or requirements. Please consult the applicable statutes, regulations, or case law for additional information concerning the matters discussed in this BEC.

Fire Drills

The Pennsylvania School Code requires that fire drills be conducted in every public school at least once a month while school is in session. Public schools include schools in school districts; charter schools; cyber charter schools, when they utilize a physical facility; career and technology centers; and intermediate units. Fire drills must include the actual removal of teachers and students from the building to a place of safety on the ground outside. Schools not required by law to maintain fire escapes, fire extinguishers, and fire exits are exempt from the requirement to conduct fire drills, but are strongly encouraged to do so. See 24 P.S. §§ 15-1517, 15-1518, 17-1732-A, 17-1749-A.

PDE requires each school entity to submit an annual certification related to the completion of these drills through the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS). By July 30 following the end of a school year, each school entity must submit a report that includes the date on which each monthly fire drill was held. After input of the report, a printed, signed original must be sent to PDE's Office for Safe Schools.

In the Fall of each year, PDE will report on its publicly accessible website a listing of the school entities that have not complied with the reporting requirements for the previous school year.

Bus Evacuations

The Pennsylvania School Code requires that all schools, including school districts, charter schools, career and technology centers, and intermediate units, that use or contract school buses for transportation of students shall conduct two emergency school bus evacuation drills during each school year. The first drill must be conducted during the first week of the school term and the second during the month of March.

Each bus evacuation drill must include the instruction on the location and use of emergency exit doors and fire extinguishers and the proper evacuation of the bus. See 24 P.S. §§ 15-1517, 17-1732-A.

The Pennsylvania Vehicle Code defines “school bus” as a vehicle designed to carry 11 or more passengers, including the driver and which is used for the transportation of pre-primary, primary or secondary school students to or from public, private or parochial schools or events related to such schools or school-related activities. 75 Pa.C.S. § 102.

Each school is required to submit an annual certification related to the completion of each emergency school bus evacuation drill. Reporting of school bus evacuation drills is done through PIMS and required information must be submitted by April 10 of every year.

In the Fall of each year, PDE will report on its publicly accessible website a listing of those school entities that have not complied with the reporting requirements for the previous school year.

REFERENCES

Purdon's Statutes

24 P.S. § 15-1517
24 P.S. § 15-1518
24 P.S. § 17-1732-A
24 P.S. § 17-1749-A
75 Pa.C.S. § 102

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