Focus on traffic safety as kids return to school

With children returning to schools, the Eugene Police Traffic Enforcement Unit would like to remind motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and skateboarders to use extra caution, especially near schools. After a long summer vacation, neighborhoods around schools will see a dramatic increase in pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The following are some tips to make the morning commute safer and smoother for everyone:

1. **Budget extra time and be patient with delays.** All drivers need to exercise patience as parents and children get used to the back-to-school commute. Some families are making this commute for their first time, which can add to an already stressful situation. It’s a good idea to leave a little earlier than normal — often parents who don’t budget adequate time for their commute end up being rushed due to unexpected delays. This also applies to all motorists who have to commute through school zone areas and are delayed due to school traffic.

2. **Watch out for pedestrians.** Children who are excited about the new school year may not always be paying attention to traffic like they should. Drive defensively and be prepared to stop quickly should a child step out into traffic.

3. **Obey traffic patrol members (crossing guards)—it’s the law.** Remember that crossing guards are in place to assist children with crossing the road in a safe manner. Drivers are required by law to stop and remained stopped any time a crossing guard indicates that children have entered or are about to enter a crosswalk. Drivers who fail to obey or fail to yield to a crossing guard are subject to a citation.
4. **Know and follow the crosswalk law.** Did you know that, in addition to approximately 900 marked crosswalks in Eugene, all intersections (except those specifically prohibiting pedestrian crossings) are considered crosswalks—even if there are no white lines marked? Drivers must yield to pedestrians in any crosswalk, whether it is marked or unmarked. Motorists must come to a complete stop and remain stopped until the pedestrian has cleared the motorist's lane and the adjacent lane. (When making a turn at a traffic light, drivers may proceed after the pedestrian has advanced 6 feet into the adjacent lane.)

According to SB 424 a pedestrian is considered to be “crossing the roadway in a crosswalk” when any part or extension of the pedestrian, including but not limited to any part of the pedestrian’s body, wheelchair, cane, crutch or bicycle, moves onto the roadway in a crosswalk with the intent to proceed.

5. **Drive the speed limit.** The speed limit in school zones is 20 mph. statewide. School speed zones on roadways adjacent to school grounds are defined and signed either as "7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on school days," or as zones with actuated flashing lights and warning signs. In Eugene, all school speed zones are the "7 a.m. to 5 p.m." type. School crosswalks not adjacent to school grounds may be signed "When Children are Present," requiring motorists to drive 20 mph. or under in the school zone when children are in a crosswalk or waiting to cross, or when a crossing guard is present. (Changes made by the 2005 Oregon Legislature eliminated the "at all times" school zones and the variety of times school speed zones were in effect, in an effort to simplify the law for the public's understanding.)

6. **Stop for school buses.** Drivers must stop for a school bus when its red lights are flashing, even if it is on the other side of the street (unless there is a median or barrier dividing the opposing lanes of traffic).

7. **Exercise caution if walking, bicycling or skateboarding.** Parents and children are advised to select lower-traffic streets for their walk or bike ride to school when possible. Pedestrians should cross the street only at crosswalks, not between intersections, and wait for a walk signal or green light if the intersection has a signal. Make eye contact with drivers to ensure they see you. If riding a bus, always cross the street in front of the bus, not behind it. Those bicycling or skateboarding to school should always wear helmets (for those under 16, it's required by law) and ride in the same direction of traffic, and bicyclists should ride in the bike lane or far right of the roadway. Under no circumstances is skateboarding allowed on the streets, including bike lanes, and
it is only permitted on bike paths and sidewalks outside of the downtown area. Remember that under most circumstances bicyclists must obey the same rules of the road as motorists.

For additional information to help you prepare for the upcoming school year, visit USA.gov’s “Back to School,” page, and Eugene Safe Routes to School, www.eugenesrts.org for resources:

- Keep track of required immunizations
- See if your child qualifies for low-cost meals
- Find affordable health insurance
- Help your child with homework
- Re-use and recycle school supplies
- Prepare healthy meals
- Promote physical activity

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