

Volusia County Sheriff's Office

Ben F. Johnson, Sheriff

News Release

Post Office Box 569, DeLand, FL 32721-0569

Office: (386) 254-4602; (386) 736-5989; Mobile: (386) 804-3973

Pager: (386) 691-2460 Fax: (386) 736-5986 Media Line: (386) 740-5253

E-mail: <mailto:Gdavidson@vcso.us> Web site: <http://volusia.org/sheriff/>

Crime Stoppers of Northeast Florida 1-888-277-TIPS

Send the PIO a text message: <http://messaging.nextel.com/cgi/iPageExt.dll?cmd=buildIndAddressPage>

August 19, 2009

For immediate release

Contact: Gary Davidson, Public Information Officer

MOTORISTS REMINDED TO PUT SAFETY FIRST AS SCHOOL STARTS UP

With public schools going back into session in Volusia County on Monday, motorists will be sharing the roadways once again with school buses, bicyclists and pedestrians on their way to campus. And Volusia County Sheriff's deputies will be out in force reminding motorists to drive cautiously, watch out for children and buses and observe the rules of the road. School crossing guards also will be back at their posts each weekday morning and afternoon to help ensure that the trip to and from school is a safe one for elementary school students who walk or ride their bikes to school. "The start of the school year can be a hectic time for students, parents and drivers," said Sheriff Ben Johnson. "We want to make sure that our residents are mindful of potential hazards and are putting safety first as they return to their back-to-school routines."

Motorists are reminded to stop for children walking through crosswalks and be alert for school buses loading and unloading students. Speed limits in school zones will be strictly enforced. Drivers also are encouraged to exercise an extra dose of patience, drive defensively, plan for extra drive time to get to their destination and be ready to stop at all times. And remember that buses will be making frequent stops. It's not only dangerous to students, but it's against the law to pass a school bus while it's stopped on the roadway picking up or dropping off students. And this applies to traffic going in both directions. The goal, according to Sheriff Johnson, is to keep the public alert and safety-conscious in order to prevent accidents, injuries and traffic violations. "We're not looking to write a bunch of tickets and would much rather achieve voluntary compliance," said Sheriff Johnson. "However, our deputies will be enforcing the statutes and doing whatever is necessary to protect our children as well as the motoring public."

Here are some additional safety tips to keep in mind as the school year gets ready to kick off:

For Parents

- If you drive your children to school, drop them off and pick them up as close to the school as possible. If the school has a drop-off area, be sure to use it.
- Be especially alert for student drivers.

- When turning at an intersection, be sure to yield to pedestrians and cyclists.
- If your child is walking to school or a bus stop, plan a safe route and make sure your child knows the route and can navigate it safely. Choose the most direct route with the fewest street crossings. If a school crossing guard is available, be sure that your child crosses at that location. If your child is young or is walking to a new school, walk the route with them beforehand and continue to walk with them for the first week until they're comfortable with the route.

For Students Who Ride the Bus

- Stay out of the street while waiting for the bus.
- Wait for the bus to come to a complete stop and the doors open before approaching the bus from the curb.
- Make sure you remain in clear view of the bus driver.
- Look both ways before crossing the street to get on the bus.
- After getting off the bus, look both ways and then move immediately onto the sidewalk and out of traffic.

For Walkers/Bike Riders

- For bike riders, wear a helmet at all times. Research shows that this simple act can reduce the risk of head injury by up to 85 percent.
- Bike riders should ride on the right, in the same direction as traffic, and use appropriate hand signals. Bicyclists also should respect traffic lights and stop signs.
- Walk or bike with a friend. It's safer that way.
- Walk on sidewalks where available.
- Always cross at intersections.
- Both bikers and walkers should wear bright clothing to make them more visible to drivers.
- To avoid distractions, bikers and walkers shouldn't use a cell phone or headphones.

Campus Safety

- Drive at slow, safe speeds in parking lots.
- Lock your vehicle and secure all property out of view.

Stranger/Danger

- Teach your children to immediately get away from anyone who follows or bothers them or does anything to make them feel uncomfortable. Also, teach your child about common lure methods. For example, stress to them that adults shouldn't ask for a child's help to find a lost pet or get directions. An adult who genuinely needs assistance will ask another adult for help.
- Teach your child to run away in the opposite direction if they're followed or approached by a suspicious person or vehicle. They should be instructed to run to a safe haven, which is any location where a trusted adult can help them, and call 911 if they have a cell phone.
- Teach your child that if a stranger tries to grab them, they should yell and make a scene to generate attention and do whatever is necessary to get away, such as kicking, punching, scratching or biting the culprit.
- Teach your child to tell a teacher, school resource officer or other trusted adult if they notice a stranger hanging around their school or bus stop. In order to get a good description for law

enforcement, coach your child on what to look for during a suspicious encounter, such as the type and color of the vehicle, the license plate number, the sex of the driver and any physical or clothing description they can get as well as any distinguishing marks or features on the person or vehicle.

- Children should be taught to never leave school with anyone they don't know.

Bullying

- Talk to your children about bullying and give them some strategies for coping with it. Children should be encouraged to not give in to a bully's demands, but instead should simply walk away and tell the bully to stop. Parents should be mindful of the fact that children may be embarrassed about being targeted by bullies and might not confide in them. Tell them it's O.K. to report a bully to a teacher, administrator or school resource officer.