

Coach Convoys Lead to Avoidable Chain-reaction Crashes

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As the busy season begins, many of you will be organizing multi-coach moves. These trips need to be organized in a coordinated way that combines the reservation process, maintenance, operations and dispatch departments in a cooperative approach. The team approach contributes to a successful outcome, satisfied customers, and the opportunity for a profitable trip.

Multi-coach moves present a series of critical challenges which, if not met properly, could result in costly, complicated, and potentially serious claims. There may be nothing worse than two or more of your coaches and their passengers being involved in a convoy crash. These crashes often involve 100 or more passengers all of whom can potentially file an injury claim. These are YOUR customers, and what they will remember about the trip is they were in a multi-coach crash while a passenger in one of your vehicles!

THE RESERVATION PROCESS IS CRITICAL

When the trip is being booked, take the time to explain to your customer that multi-coach moves require careful planning, and all involved coaches will operate independently of each other and arrive at the destination usually within five to ten minutes of each other. This is your first opportunity to control the multi-coach trip risk through the process of customer education. The customer may expect the coaches to leave at the same time and follow each other in order to "keep the group together." There is a BIG difference, however, between keeping a group together within a venue and getting them to the venue and back safely. A reasonable approach may be to use the example that few venues can manage processing 100-200 people arriving at the same time, so coaches arriving five to ten minutes apart may actually save time and provide the group leaders with a better ability to manage their group. This can be followed up with a simple review of why safe driving and providing a comfortable trip involves greater following distance between the coaches.

When conducting a multi-coach move, each vehicle should leave five to ten minutes apart and maintain at least a five-minute following distance. Each driver should be able to carry out the trip independent of the other coaches in the group. Your drivers should be made aware of specific direction, routes, road construction/congestions areas, and possible weather issues. Drivers should prepare in advance and avoid the use of non-commercial GPS devices for directions. Finally, the trip coordinator or tour guide should be informed that the coaches will not convoy but, for safety reasons, will maintain a safe following distance.

Convoy crashes occur because the trailing driver is simply following too closely. Multi-coach moves create hazards but you can still provide good customer service and a safe trip. The easiest approach for your drivers is to review and know the directions to the destination, operate the coach as if it were the only vehicle on the trip and always maintain a safe following distance of at least five minutes from the other coaches and at least a six-second following distance from other vehicles on the road.

While there may be need for communication between the drivers (when the vehicles are parked or during a driving break), no driver should be dependent on the coach ahead of it for either directions or visual contact. Each driver should view their coach as an independent vehicle going to the same destination as other company vehicles on the same road.

AVOID THE CONVOY CRASH NIGHTMARE

The hazards of a convoy crash can create a negative experience and be costly in many ways, including: costly law suits, loss of future revenue, negative publicity, and reduced number of coaches at your disposal during your busy season.

Multi-coach moves are good for your business, but only when they are well planned, organized in a cooperative approach among your reservations, maintenance, operations and dispatch teams and conducted by your drivers in a safe and professional manner.