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[Headlines]

The Intricacies of Installing School Bus Cameras

Installing cameras on school buses has become a practice that more and more districts are taking up, even in these troubled economic times. But, like the installation of many new technologies, there are some things that you learn after you make the mistake. STN reached out to Apollo Video Technology, REI, Seon, Safety Vision, AngelTrax, ICOP Digital Inc., Fortress Mobile and 247 Security to find out some of the biggest dos and don'ts faced by transportation departments that have taken it upon themselves to perform installs.



Dos

1. Try different lens combinations to get the best images possible.
2. Consult with other districts or school bus companies regarding their experiences with image quality, ease-of-use, and type of information to capture.
3. Meet with vendors for equipment demonstrations.
4. Place your DVR in a convenient location for necessary access; make sure it is relatively undetectable.
5. Always talk to your supplier before you start. They will have more helpful tips for installing the specific model you purchased.
6. Review your school's or company's policies for student record management.
7. Ground the recorder and cameras to reduce noise in the video image.

Don'ts

1. Don't attempt to cover too much area with one camera.
2. Don't short-cut the video system with cheap cameras.
3. Don't install the DVR on or near the floor or under the driver-side window.
4. Never leave any wires exposed.
5. Don't forget to plan for spare hard drives, recorders, cameras or other system components.
6. Don't forget to involve your IT department when it comes to using recording devices that will communicate through the district's or company's network.
7. Never perform a fleet-wide install without performing a pilot installation for testing and setting final specifications for camera placement, lens selection, cabling approach, recorder placement, bus data inputs, switches, systems status indicators and other on-board integration. ■

Surveillance System Clears School Bus Driver Charged with Running Rail Crossing

Most school bus operators employ onboard surveillance systems to record student behavior, and sometimes that of drivers. Despite the helpful data they are able to record, the systems can sometimes be looked at with disdain. But a driver with a 17-year unblemished safety record has the technology to thank for recently saving her job.

Last October, the dispatcher for Escambia School District in Pensacola, Fla., received a call from the state highway patrol that a school bus had been involved in an accident at a railroad crossing. Railroad employees on the scene reported to police that a school bus driver had run the crossing gate and caused damage to property.

But their story differed from that of the driver, who said she had made a legal stop at the crossing but was told by railroad employees that the crossing arm was malfunctioning and to proceed. As she crossed, the crossing gate lowered and struck the bus, but since there was no visible damage, the driver proceeded with her route. Then, 45 minutes later, the highway patrol called and ordered the driver to return to the scene of the accident.

Eric Fritz, Escambia's transportation director, drove to the crossing with a couple of his transportation managers to survey the damage.

"The railway workers said that our bus went into the opposite lane and tried to beat the crossing arm," he recalled. "They said that the oncoming traffic arm was already down, so she weaved her bus in between the two. There was a load of (45) high school students on the bus. We were really surprised."

Fritz and his staff used a trooper's laptop to access the school district's network and retrieve bus GPS data from Everyday Solutions to determine what happened.

"What it was able to tell us is that she made the proper stop in the proper lane," he said. "When we got back to the office, we cross-referenced the GPS information with video from Seon's digital video record-

er. When we reviewed the video, the rear-facing video helped the most, and what we saw was that the driver had made a proper stop. There were no bells going off at the crossing, and we were able to see that there

and all the kids turned towards the noise."

A copy of the video was made and turned into the highway patrol as evidence. After an investigation, all charges were dropped, and Escambia District was able to bill the

railroad for damages to the bus. If found guilty, the driver would have lost her commercial driver's license and her job at Escambia.

"Normally, the railway employees' story would have been credible because there were multiple witnesses," Fritz added.

"But the cameras were able to show what actually happened.

"From a management perspective, we were able to instantly know that our employee was telling the truth, and we were able to back her up. It was great to be able to do that." ■

"Normally, the railway employees' story would have been credible because there were multiple witnesses. But the cameras were able to show what actually happened."

— Eric Fritz, Escambia, Fla., transportation director

were cars in the oncoming lane passing the bus, which shows that what the railroad workers reported could not have been true.

"When the bus took off from its proper stop, you can clearly see the stop-arm coming down on the back-quarter of the bus,

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