



# Passenger News

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**Inside this Issue**

- 1** *Hot & Cold Cabs*  
*What you can do*
- 2** *Cold & Hot Weather*

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**Hot and Cold Cabs: What you can do**

Hot and cold cabs are often an emotive issue for our members, and rightly so! For years, bus drivers have had to deal with discomfort in their cabs all year round, winter and summer. With a changing climate we are experiencing more weather extremes, including hotter summers. Working in conditions that are too hot – or too cold – can expose members to unacceptable health risks and a discomforted driver could be a danger for passengers. Heaters and demisters that don't work (or work when they're not supposed to!) or just blow cold, buses with persistent defects to heaters, cabs where air conditioning is positioned inappropriately (e.g. directly over a driver's head) are only some examples of problems experienced by members.

Members should always remember to keep in touch with a depot Unite safety representative on thermal comfort issues, as they have extensive rights in the workplace and can help to resolve these problems.

**Stop and think before taking any action**

Refusing to drive a bus without being sure of your position may result in disciplinary action and/or dismissal. If a case goes to an employment tribunal the outcome is never certain. Make sure your local negotiated procedures dealing with this issue are clear and are communicated to all members. Any members who are not clear about their position should consult their shop steward immediately

Union Reps throughout the bus industry are doing their best to deal with cab temperature problems. But the solutions our members want are not always easy to achieve and too many employers are putting heater repairs etc. much too low down their list of priorities. Acting early to raise problems with management is the best way to avoid confrontation in the depot on winter mornings when a driver refuses to take a bus out!

- ✓ Designate responsibility to particular steward(s) – “bus defect reps” - to liaise with management on maintenance issues, and ensure they have the facility time to do this.
- ✓ Safety reps can use their rights to information to request copies of bus maintenance records.

Make sure that the maintenance programme for buses, including that covering heating, ventilation and air conditioning, is timed properly to anticipate the change of seasons. An annual maintenance check would be a good starting point. The employer shouldn't leave it until December to carry out maintenance checks on heaters or until July to check that the air conditioning/ventilation is working! Try and negotiate a day in the early Autumn and again in the late Spring when buses can be checked for temperature issues.

- ✓ Focusing management's attention on cab issues can also open up discussions on other cab improvements, such as cab refurbishment and replacing out-dated seats.
- ✓ Written evidence that you have reported a defect is vital in the event of any dispute. What about a Unite vehicle defect sheet if the company's is limited?
- ✓ Bus maintenance, including temperature issues, should be standing item on your health and safety committee agenda.

- ✓ Operating staff reps and engineering and maintenance reps should co-ordinate their efforts, to ensure that we are all singing off the same hymn sheet!
- ✓ Work with the employer to ensure that sufficient spares, e.g. replacement heaters, are kept at the garage.
- ✓ Make sure your employer considers ergonomic issues, such as seating, in the cab both now and when purchasing new vehicles
- ✓ Make sure that risk assessments are carried out on thermal comfort, including for pregnant drivers.
- ✓ Does your employer provide training for adverse weather conditions such as winter driving?

**Encourage your members to help themselves by using the proper reporting procedures effectively. In case of dispute over bus defects, managers are often quick to point to the lack of clear written reports. All members should:**

- Report any heater defect immediately to the employer using the agreed reporting procedure – especially if the heater, air conditioning, windscreen wipers or demisters are not working.
- On cold days, if the heater is not effective within 1 hour, you should insist on a changeover at the nearest reasonable location.
- If defects persist, report this to the employer in writing, identifying the bus number and clearly stating the date(s) when specific defects were found. Make sure your report is clear about the nature of the defect(s), and get a copy to your Unite safety rep/shop steward.
- Draughts under the dashboard or through the cab window in cold weather also need attention – so do report them! Similarly in hot weather, cab windows which do not fully open, heaters which won't turn off and cool air blowers which do not work should also be reported.

**The Union should aim to negotiate an agreed procedure to deal with known and expected problems so that drivers and supervisors know what to do in given situations.**

### **Cold weather**

Agree a system with the employer to ensure a replacement bus is provided within a specified time if the heating isn't working (agreements vary across the country, and this can be from 30 minutes to an hour). Arrangements can be made for a suitable handover point on the route to minimise inconvenience for passengers.

Ensure the employer has risk assessed the implications of working alone – how to keep in touch with the employer in the event of breakdown or when stranded in bad weather. No driver should be left unaided for excessive periods of time in cold weather as there is a real danger of hypothermia etc. Agreed procedures should specify when and how to allow employees to leave the bus to keep warm, provision of protective clothing, blankets etc.

Negotiate with the employer so as to enable members to wear warm clothing such as woolly hats and gloves in cold weather and make provision for extra breaks for hot drinks, free of charge!

### **Hot Weather**

Negotiate with the employer to enable members wear light clothing and footwear when driving.

Are all bus cabs air conditioned or provided with fans? If not, when will they be?

Ensure members have easy access to drinking water and free cold drinks

Heat exhaustion can be a real problem at the height of summer. Make sure procedures exist to relieve drivers when necessary and in extreme cases get medical aid.

Negotiate Union Inspection Notices (UINs) in your workplace. A UIN is a formal notice registering that an employer is not complying with health and safety legislation in respect of an identified workplace hazard. The TUC/Hazards leaflet (see Further Information below) sets out how they work in more detail, but they should only be used by a Unite accredited safety rep after they have received appropriate training. This is an effective way of giving an employer who has been ignoring complaints written notice of a problem – and requesting action by a certain date.

For more information on UINs and for health and safety advice please contact Susan Murray 0207 611 2596 [susan.murray@unitetheunion.org](mailto:susan.murray@unitetheunion.org)