

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY QUESTION 1139

PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 08-09-2006 (INTERNAL QUESTION NO. 28-2006)

Mr M Waters to ask the Minister of Education:

- (1) Whether it is a requirement that all buses contracted by any provincial department of education to transport children to schools must have seat belts in order for children to buckle up; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (2) whether she will undertake to ensure that all buses transporting children to school have seatbelts for passengers; if not, why not; if so, by when will this be enforced?

N1490E

REPLY:

- (1) My Department has completed a review of the framework and policy for learner transport in the provinces, and we are not aware of any national or provincial requirements that school buses must have seat belts.

Seat belts as a safety device in vehicles are regulated by the National Road Traffic Act, 1996 (Act no 93 of 1996). In terms of this Act, seat belts are not compulsory for public transport vehicles generally. Seat belts are, however, required for minibus taxis in terms of the taxi recapitalization plan and provided for in 2005 Amendments to the National Road Traffic Act.

Learner transport is governed by the relevant transport legislation (pertaining among other things to roadworthiness) and provincial education departments. I cannot speculate as to why these regulators have not seen fit to introduce rules in regard to seat belts in public transport and school buses. I have heard that the Department of Transport is considering the issue of compulsory seat belts for all public transport vehicles (see also response of the Minister of Transport Parliamentary Question 275 of 10 October 2001).

In our limited review, it appears that the extensive research that has been conducted in a number of localities is still not conclusive on the safety benefit of seat belts in school buses. The Canada Safety Council concluded that "(t)here is still no scientific evidence that lives would be saved [by adding seats belts to school buses]". A US study (quoted by the Canada Safety Council) concluded that seat belts in school buses "will cause additional head injuries and probably additional deaths in some crashes".

- (2) My Department has undertaken a review of the status quo with regard to learner transport schemes and is in the process of developing a framework and probably guidelines and/or regulations for learner transport schemes.

Safety standards are currently being contemplated as a component of such a framework; the matter of seat belts in school buses will be considered in cooperation with the Department of Transport.