

# Coach safety on the Milford Road

Procedures to ensure safer journeys when travelling on State Highway 94



## State Highway 94 from Te Anau to Milford Sound poses special challenges for drivers of coaches and other vehicles.

- The climb from Milford Sound to Homer Tunnel is steep and windy. Vehicles can overheat, and the behaviour of other drivers who are unfamiliar with the road can be erratic.
- Some coaches have caught fire on this stretch of SH94.
- Homer Tunnel is narrow and does not have all the safety features of a modern tunnel.
- SH94 passes through a mountain area which means that snow and ice on the road are a common hazard in the colder months.
- During winter and spring there is potential for avalanches to affect some parts of SH94.
- Assistance from emergency services cannot arrive quickly.
- Normal communication channels cannot be relied on because of the mountainous terrain and remoteness of the area.



# Check your coach to reduce the risk of fire

## YOU SHOULD CARRY OUT THESE CHECKS AT THE START OF EACH DAY AND BEFORE YOU LEAVE MILFORD SOUND

- ☑ Look for tyres that are flat or partly flat.
- ☑ Check that tyres on dual wheels are not touching one another.
- ☑ Make sure that no liquids are leaking onto the road, or into the engine compartment. Water coming from the air conditioning system is okay – any other dripping, spray or misting is not.
- ☑ Check that there is no oil or fuel on the engine bay linings. Insulation material that is soaked in oil or diesel will make any fire much worse.
- ☑ Check operation of the diesel-fired water heater if your vehicle has one and check fuel lines for leaks. On modern coaches these supply hot water to air conditioning units and on some older Japanese sourced vehicles they heat the bus interior.
- ☑ Check that the exhaust brake is working correctly if your vehicle has one.
- ☑ Check that the brakes release properly.
- ☑ Check that there is no oil coming from the exhaust pipe and no debris in the pipe.
- ☑ Check for excessive blue smoke from the exhaust – this could indicate the turbocharger is burning oil.
- ☑ Check that the vehicle has an unexpired fire extinguisher.

**Do not start your trip if you notice any of these problems. Call your base for advice and instructions on getting any problems fixed.**

**If necessary, make alternative travel arrangements for your passengers.**

## WHEN YOU ARE DRIVING (AND ESPECIALLY BEFORE YOU ENTER THE TUNNEL)

- ✓ Check the temperature gauges for overheating.
- ✓ Check the low tyre pressure monitor if your vehicle has one.
- ✓ Check the air pressure gauge and/or warning light. Low air pressure can cause spring brakes to apply and bind.
- ✓ Check the ABS warning light.
- ✓ Check that the retarder is working properly.

### Stop the vehicle and park in a safe area if you notice:

- any of the above problems
- any warning light or buzzer
- any excessive heat or smoke
- any unusual smell coming from the vehicle.

**If possible, call your base for advice and assistance. If necessary, arrange for other coach(es) to take your passengers on to their destination.**

## AFTER COMPLETING A LONG TRIP OR AT THE END OF THE DAY

- ✓ Record any problems in the vehicle's defect card/sheet.
- ✓ Tell a mechanic or the next driver if there are problems requiring attention.

# If there is a fire ...

## IF YOUR COACH CATCHES FIRE ON THE OPEN ROAD

1. Stop immediately (in a safe place if you can).
2. Apply the parking brake and hazard lights.
3. Open the doors.
4. Tell the passengers to leave the vehicle immediately and indicate the nearest safe place to assemble.
5. Stop the engine and switch off the master switch (if it is immediately accessible).
6. Check that passengers have evacuated the vehicle.
7. Leave the vehicle yourself.
8. Call the Fire Service on 111 or your base if your mobile or radio is working. If you are near either tunnel portal, use the emergency phone at the portal. Otherwise ask another driver to drive to the nearest emergency phone and call for help. Provide as much information as possible about your location, the nature of the fire, number of passengers and any injuries.

9. Identify the source of the fire.
10. If it is safe to do so, use the fire extinguisher to fight the fire. **DO NOT OPEN THE ENGINE COMPARTMENT IF THAT IS WHERE THE FIRE IS.**
11. Secure the surrounding area and warn other traffic as best you can.
12. Make sure that passengers and bystanders are at a safe distance.
13. Follow the advice of emergency services or the NZTA road maintenance contractor's personnel and assist them as best you can.
14. When you can, let your base know about the fire and request assistance for yourself and your passengers.
15. Advise your passengers what arrangements are being made for them.

### **IF YOUR COACH OR ANOTHER VEHICLE CATCHES FIRE IN THE TUNNEL**

- Drive out if possible, then evacuate your passengers and follow the instructions above.
- If you cannot drive out:
  1. Stop immediately.
  2. Apply the parking brake and hazard lights.
  3. Open the doors.
  4. Tell the passengers to leave the vehicle immediately, tell them the safest direction to walk towards and roughly how far it is to the tunnel exit. The safest direction will generally be towards the nearest end of the tunnel, but if there is a strong wind pushing smoke in that direction, it may be safer to head for the further away end of the tunnel.
  5. Stop the engine and switch off the master switch (if it is immediately accessible).
  6. Check that passengers have evacuated the vehicle.
  7. **DO NOT** try to fight the fire. Leave the tunnel immediately with your passengers.
  8. Assist anyone who needs help to get to the tunnel exit.
  9. Count your passengers when they exit the tunnel to make sure they have got out safely.
  10. Use the emergency phone at the tunnel portal to alert the control room, who will call the emergency services. Provide as much information as possible about the nature of the fire, number of passengers and any injuries.
  11. Secure the surrounding area and warn other traffic as best you can.
  12. Make sure that passengers and bystanders are at a safe distance.
  13. Follow the advice of emergency services or the NZTA road maintenance contractor's personnel, and assist them as best you can.

14. When you can, let your base know about the fire and request assistance for yourself and the passengers.
15. Advise the passengers what arrangements are being made for them.



Emergency phone

## SH94 SAFETY EQUIPMENT

**Emergency phones** are located at each tunnel portal and at The Chapel on the eastern side.

**Fire extinguishers** are located at each tunnel portal.

**Remote monitoring** of cameras and sensors is carried out at a control room in Te Anau. The control room has communication links to the NZTA road maintenance contractor's personnel and to emergency services.

**Infrared cameras and floodlights** are located in the tunnel. These enable the control room operator to see inside the tunnel in low light conditions.

**A thermal imaging camera** is located at the western tunnel portal. This will detect high temperature in a passing vehicle and sound an alarm in the control room.

**Registration plate recognition cameras** are located at each tunnel portal. These are connected to a computer which will sound an alarm at the control room if a vehicle that has entered the tunnel has not exited within a set time.

**Airflow sensors** are located inside the tunnel. These tell the control room which direction the air is moving in the tunnel and how fast.

**Loudspeakers** are located inside the tunnel. The control room can use these to provide advice on which is the safest direction to evacuate the tunnel in the event of an incident.

**Variable message signs** at both tunnel portals enable the control room to provide information on safety issues, traffic conditions and expected wait times at the tunnel.

## CHECKING ROAD CONDITIONS AND STATUS

You can check on the status of SH94 at any time at [www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/milfordroad](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/milfordroad) or by phoning **0800 444 449**.

## PROCEDURES FOR DRIVING IN SNOW AND ICE

When snow or ice are present on SH94 (generally about 20 days per year between June and November) you may be instructed to pull into the NZTA kiosk which is located about 8.5km north of Te Anau. The kiosk is not staffed at all times.

If your coach has not been checked recently, you will have to demonstrate to the kiosk personnel that you're carrying the right chains and that you know how to fit them.

If your coach has been checked recently or if you are an accredited driver who has completed the Bus and Coach Association Milford Road safety training programme, you can use the special fast lane which bypasses the full check procedure.

**YOU MUST FIT CHAINS WHENEVER YOU SEE THIS SIGN**



### PROCEDURES FOR DRIVING WHEN THERE IS A RISK OF AVALANCHES

SH94 is prone to avalanches between May and December on the 17km stretch between Falls Creek (91km north of Te Anau) and The Chasm on the Milford side of the tunnel.

Any vehicle caught in an avalanche is likely to be destroyed and the people in the vehicle are likely to be killed or seriously injured.

Check the avalanche danger signage and obey the safe driving procedures at all times.

Signs located at Te Anau (1km north of township), Knobs Flat (65km north of Te Anau) and Milford Sound (5km east of Milford Sound) display the current avalanche hazard, which will be classified as low, moderate or high.

AVALANCHE HAZARD	PROBABILITY OF AVALANCHES	ROAD STATUS
Low	Avalanches are unlikely	Road is open
Moderate	Avalanches are possible	Road could be closed at short notice
High	Avalanches are expected	Road is closed

This sign is posted at the beginning and end of the avalanche area. When driving through this area make sure you stop only in one of the two signposted safe stopping areas (The Chapel and Monkey Creek).



This sign is posted near the most active avalanche paths. Make sure you obey them and do not stop in the avalanche area.





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