

# be introduced on all school buses now belt up



**FATAL CRASH:** The bus crash which caused the death of five students last week.

have to bolt before we do something," says Mr Jackson.

"The situation at the moment is crazy," agrees President of PACCS, Humphrey O'Riordan from Millstreet.

"We drop our kids off at the school bus and if they are caught with no seatbelts, we are fined but they don't have to wear them on buses," says Mr O'Riordan.

"There have been a lot of enquiries into bus safety in recent times but nothing has been done. It's all talk and no action. Maybe we're fierce lucky that a lot more children were not killed last week" he says.

According to a spokeswoman for

the Department of Education, Margaret McCarthy, Bus Éireann will be phasing out the 'three for two' system over the next two to three years.

As regards other changes, it's a case of awaiting the results of the three investigations into the crash.

"All of the safety issues will be considered in the context of the reports and recommendations from the investigations," says Ms McCarthy.

There are three investigations underway at the moment.

An independent committee is carrying out an investigation on behalf

of Bus Éireann. Inquiries by the Health and Safety Authority and the Garda Síochána are also underway.

While the National Parents Council, Post Primary, is calling on all parents to boycott school buses that do not have seat belts or operate the two for three rule from September, PACCS's response is somewhat more measured.

"We can't wave a magic wand and expect it to be all fixed overnight," says Mr O'Riordan.

"If by the end of the next two years all buses have seatbelts and take only one child per seat, we will be happy."

## Bus Éireann review

A BUS Éireann spokeswoman today said that a review of the condition of all school buses began two months ago.

She added: "I can assure you that it is not Bus Éireann practice to allow vehicles in a state of disrepair to operate. If a window was broken or there was a hole in the bus, it would be withdrawn from service immediately and repaired, as both of these would constitute a hazard.

"Bus Éireann is aware that there is room for improvement as far as some buses are concerned. When the review is completed, action will be taken where necessary to upgrade buses, or if necessary to replace them. All buses used in schools transport have passed Department of the Environment roadworthiness tests.

"Buses, especially those used by school children are subject to wear and tear, and unfortunately in some instances anti-social behaviour and vandalism."



**FLOWERS:** Pupils from St Michael's Loreto Convent girls school in Navan lay flowers at a makeshift shrine

## O'Shea on Monday

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### Can I have my money back?

LAST Monday I wrote a column about the perennially complex world of consumer affairs.

So as not to confuse people too much and because of restrictions of space, I chose one particular subject: The navigation of oneself once inside a supermarket.

Judging from some of the letters I have received via e-mail these past seven days, it seems that this is not the number one issue concerning consumer advice that the average Irish letter-writer to a newspaper wants to read about.

Some of the words in these letters were not kind and I shudder when mouthing them to myself in the bathroom mirror (I turn on the taps so no one will overhear). The main thrust was that only an idiot would find it difficult to make their way around supermarkets these days. They even seemed to be implying that I might be an idiot.

What I think these correspondents failed to understand was that last week's piece was in fact a thinly-veiled satirical attack on the incumbent US administration's foreign policy.

Is it my fault that "some" people did not get that?

Yes, it probably is, so this week I have decided give some sound consumer advice.

One thing that struck me forcibly about these letters of complaint was that they were badly written, badly structured and almost devoid of coherent argument.

When writing a letter of complaint, logical and lucid sentences are best.

How do I know this? Experience, for I myself am a frequent penner of such letters.

Now I would not be one to "toot my own horn" when it comes to consumer knowledge as most of the stuff I know is what I can remember from bus. org. classes circa. 1997.

The most important thing to remember is that in the case of something you have purchased not being of merchantable quality eg a toaster that will not toast or a blow-up doll that will not deflate, you are entitled to the "three rs": repair, replacement or refund.

There are also three ways of dealing with the piece of crap you have bought.

Firstly, you can bring it back to the shop. The majority of people who take things back will probably have little hassle and be satisfied with a replacement or a credit note. I am not one of the majority and something tells me that neither are most of you out there.

For us, there is always some contract or other we haven't read and we more than likely threw away with the box. At the counter, after refusing a refund, the girl at the desk says: "Sorry, but that's store policy," and then you ask if you can see a copy of the store's policy because you think it would make for some interesting reading and she tells you she thinks it

**ROBERT O'SHEA**  
*on the best way for consumers to complain about their faulty purchase*

might and she'll get the manager now and you tell her you think that would be a good idea.

By the time the manger gets there, I have usually left, because I am utterly, utterly afraid of human confrontation in all its forms.

Next, there is the customer service helpline. If your musical tastes include Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* as performed with what sounds like a birthday party kazoo while you wait to find out why "Your call is important to us and may be monitored for future training purposes," then this is the path to consumer justice you should probably take.

My favoured method of lodging a complaint is through the written form.

And to conclude this article I will print one of my better letters from recent years.

*Dear sir/madam,*

*As a dedicated purchaser in your store off and on for some years now I can honestly say that I have always been satisfied with the mannerly treatment I have received at the hands of your staff and the quality of your shelving.*

*Therefore, it is with great disappointment that I find myself having to write to you about the following matter.*

*Recently, I became a journalist and a piece of equipment a journalist cannot do without is a dictaphone.*

*The dictaphone I bought in your store seemed to work well in the first interview I conducted. However, imagine my surprise when on the playback of the tape my own voice sounded nothing like it should (that is not my accent).*

*There was obviously something wrong with the item but when I brought it back to your store the customer services people insisted that it was my voice.*

*I know my own voice!!!*

*No reimbursement was forthcoming but I did (after much complaining) receive a replacement.*

*Need I even tell you? I had been replaced by some high-pitched yokel again.*

*This is simply not good enough. How am I supposed to concentrate on transcribing notes while listening to my voice sent up so comically by your faulty contraption?*

*I insist on a full refund*

*Yours statutorily,*

*Robert O'Shea.*

*PS. I have the receipt.*

*This case is pending in the small claims court.*