

Driver helps riders escape from bus fire

Julia Caranci , Alberni Valley Times

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Thanks to the quick thinking of a Tofino Bus driver, no one was injured when an engine fire erupted on a coach just outside Tofino on Monday.

According to Tofino Bus owner Dylan Green, the driver of the bus, which was carrying 13 passengers, had just left Tofino at about 10:30 a.m. Monday morning, and was destined for Nanaimo when the driver, a woman with four years' experience, noticed "a lot of smoke in the rearview mirror."

The driver quickly pulled the coach over to the side of the road.

"Then she realized it was an engine fire and got everyone off the bus right away," Green said.

The driver called 9-1-1, then used a fire extinguisher to put out the fire, which appeared to be under control within a short period of time.

However, the fire re-ignited a short time later -- police and fire fighters arrived at the scene within minutes and extinguished the blaze.

Dylan said it was extremely fortunate that no one was injured in the fire and that all the passengers' luggage was saved.

"That was a nice reward at the end of a tough day," Green said.

A spare bus was called in and arrived within a half-hour to take the 13 stranded passengers to their destinations. No one missed their connecting bus as a result of the mishap, Green said.

There is no word yet on what caused the engine fire. The bus was one of the company's newer coaches, leased from a Vancouver Company, Green said. He is currently working with ICBC regarding the incident -- it remains to be seen whether or not the bus is salvageable or if the company will require a new coach.

Regardless, Green commended his driver for doing everything right in a stressful situation.

"She did a great job," he said. "All my staff did an amazing job."

Green said there was a stand-by bus and extra driver on duty Monday in anticipation of a very busy traveling weekend. However, due to the wind and rainstorm that swept the region on Sunday and part of the day Monday, there were fewer passengers traveling by bus than expected. The extra staffing allowed the company to react quickly to the fire, and get passengers back on track as soon as possible.

Green also expressed gratitude to emergency personnel who responded to the fire.