



15-passenger vans are used as a convenient and cost effective transportation solution to transport students, seniors, sports groups and members of the general public. However, a serious exposure from rollover crashes exists and continues to be a concern for these types of vehicles.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has taken steps to reduce this risk by requiring electronic stability control (ESC) systems on all new 15-passenger vans. ESC systems assist drivers in maintaining control of their vehicles even during extreme steering maneuvers or on slippery roads. The presence of ESC may prevent rollovers from occurring, however, 15-passenger vans are often in use for many years, and models produced prior to 2004 likely do not have this crash prevention technology installed.



NHTSA's Top Safety Recommendations for 15-Passenger Van Use:

Keep your passenger load light. The more occupants you have in a 15-passenger van the higher the center of gravity becomes, making them more susceptible to rollover. Never allow more than 15 people to ride in a 15-passenger van. When the van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.

Inspect the tires and check tire pressure before each use. Fatal rollovers of 15-passenger vans are most likely to involve tire failures. NHTSA research shows that tires on 15-passenger vans are often under inflated and in use past their service life. Aged tires are more prone to failure even if they appear to be new (as in the case of original spare tires). Avoid using old spares when replacing worn tires since all tires, even unused tires, weaken with age. Be sure to identify the recommended tire pressure on the tire sidewall and in the owner's manual as they are sometimes different.

To determine tire age, check the DOT date code located on the inboard sidewall of the tire. The DOT code will be featured at the end of the grouping of characters which begin with the letters "DOT." Since 2000, the week and year that the tire was produced has been provided by the last four digits of the Tire Identification Number with the 2 digits being used to identify the week immediately preceding the 2 digits used to identify the year. For example, "5107" would be the 51st week of 2007.

Require all occupants to use their seatbelts or child restraints. All occupants need to wear seat belts at all times. Be sure that employees have proper training on how to install child restraints. An unrestrained 15-passenger van occupant involved in a single-vehicle crash is approximately three times as likely to be killed as a restrained occupant.



Cargo should be placed forward of the rear axle and placing any loads on the roof should be avoided. See the vehicle owner's manual for maximum weight of passengers and cargo and avoid overloading the van. Do not tow anything behind the van.

Be mindful of speed and road conditions. Wind and road conditions can force a vehicle to slide sideways off the road. The grassy or dirt medians and shoulders can cause vans to overturn when the tires dig into the dirt. 15-passenger vans do not respond well to abrupt steering maneuvers. Train drivers on how to handle curved roads and quick maneuvering situations by slowing down.

Ensure drivers have proper training. 15-passenger vans should only be operated by trained, experienced drivers who operate these vehicles on a regular basis. Newer drivers should have many hours practicing with an experienced driver prior to having an occupant load of any size. Training should also include driving with a heavier load to help show the difference in handling characteristics, as well as how to use mirrors, brake time differences, blind spot awareness and backing limitations. Training should also focus on the potential for distractions when transporting children and how to handle them. It may be necessary to have another adult in the vehicle to help control some situations.

Make sure your drivers are trained on the basic maintenance of the vehicle. They should be able to identify a basic problem by checking fluids, looking for normal wear and tear, monitoring tires, seatbelts, all lights and turn signals. Your organization should have someone on staff or a company familiar with the state and federal school bus inspection requirements performing maintenance on your vehicle.

Ensure drivers are properly rested and attentive. Evaluate the length of trips in order to determine if relief drivers are needed. Cell phone use by the driver while the van is in motion should be prohibited. Drivers should also limit conversation with other passengers.



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