

PASSENGER VAN TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Large passenger vans, especially 15-passenger vans, are a popular method of transportation for many nonprofits because they are size-efficient and cost-effective. Because of their size, however, these vehicles are more likely to be involved in a single-vehicle rollover crash, according to the National Highway Traffic Administration (NHTSA). While passenger vans are convenient, they do not drive like other vehicles.

It is critical for organizations that use large passenger vans to be aware of the associated risks and the NHTSA's recommendations for reducing the chances of a rollover crash. This bulletin provides some best practices to consider when utilizing passenger vans as part of your operations.

Large passenger vans can pose a safety risk to inexperienced van drivers and other road users. Drivers must use caution to minimize the risk associated with their operation. The NHTSA recommends the following safety precautions.

Keep your passenger load light. NHTSA research has shown that the rollover risk for 15-passenger vans increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases from fewer than five to more than ten. The rollover rate of 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) in single-vehicle crashes is nearly three times the rate of those that are lightly loaded. Furthermore, it is imperative that organizations never allow more than 15 people to ride in a 15-passenger van.

Check your van's tire pressure frequently. Improperly inflated tires can change handling characteristics, increasing the prospect of a rollover crash in large passenger vans. According to the NHTSA, 11% of fatal 15-passenger van rollover crashes are attributed to tire failure. Check tire pressure at least once a week using the manufacturer's recommended pressure levels.

Require all occupants to use their seat belts or the appropriate child restraint. An unrestrained 15-passenger van occupant involved in a single-vehicle crash is approximately four times more likely to be killed than a restrained occupant, reports the NHTSA. Wearing seat belts increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash.

Whenever possible, seat passengers and place cargo forward of the rear axle, and avoid placing any loads on the roof. To lower the vehicle's center of gravity and reduce the chance of rollover, fill the seats from front to back and avoid overloading the van or placing any loads on the roof. When the van is not full, seat the passengers in front of the rear axle. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines for maximum weight of passengers and cargo.

Be mindful of speed and road conditions. NHTSA analysis of 15-passenger van crashes also shows that the risk of rollover increases significantly at speeds over 50 miles per hour and on curved roads. Keep in mind that large passenger vans require additional braking time and cannot handle abrupt maneuvers the way cars can. Always obey the posted speed limit, and reduce speed as needed based on road and weather conditions.

Only qualified drivers should be behind the wheel. Ensure drivers of passenger vans have a valid driver's license, preferably a commercial driver's license. Ensure drivers are experienced and operate this type of vehicle on a regular basis, and, that they only operate these vehicles when well rested and fully alert.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information, including free copies of 15-passenger van safety hangtags, as well as the latest NHTSA research and analysis, please visit the agency's web site at <https://www.nhtsa.gov>. Hangtags can also be ordered at no cost by contacting NHTSA's Vehicle Safety Hotline directly at 888-327-4236.

REFERENCES

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (n.d.). 15-Passenger Vans. Retrieved from: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/15-passenger-vans>

PASSENGER VAN INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Driver _____ Date _____

Department _____ Phone _____

Exterior

Walk around the exterior of the van, ensuring:

- No fluid leaks beneath the van
- Van sits level with no sign of uneven loading
- All exterior lights and signals work properly
- Windshield, windows, and exterior mirrors are clean and free of obstruction
- Windshield wipers are in good condition and there is adequate wiper fluid

Tires:

Use a guage to check the tie pressure and ensure it meets the manufacturer's guidelines:

The required tire pressure for this van is:

Front _____ Rear _____

Remember

You represent your organization when you're driving their vehicle.

Observe all traffic rules and regulations.

Drive carefully and arrive safely.

Interior

Inspect the passenger seat areas:

- Front seat area, dash and floor are clear of loose items and debris
- Interior lighting is operational
- Passenger seats and floor are clean
- Seats are secure and in good condition
- Seatbelts and webbing are free from tears / damage
- Safety restraints are accessible and available for each passenger

Sit in the driver's seat and check that the following are operating correctly:

- Horn
- Windshield wipers and washer
- Backup alarm (if equipped)
- All indicator lights and gauges
- Side and rear view mirror adjustment

Adjust your seat:

- Floor pedals, steering wheel and all other controls are within reach without straining
- Movement is not restricted

Make sure mirrors are clean and visible and adjust accordingly to reduce blind spots as much as possible.