

FACT SHEET

15-passenger Vans

Recent highly publicized rollover accidents involving 15-passenger vans loaded with college students has caused the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to issue a cautionary warning to users of 15-passenger vans.

The NHTSA reports that 15-passenger vans loaded to occupant capacity have a 70% greater risk of rollovers. When carrying five passengers or less, 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk similar to light trucks and other vans. However, the risk of rollover increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases. The risk increases 20.9% with five to nine passengers. With ten to fifteen passengers the risk increases to 29.1%.

There are two significant reasons for the increased rollover potential. One reason is the destabilization of the vehicle. Packing the vans to full capacity either with occupants and/or equipment shifts the center of gravity up and to the rear. Under normal operation this is not an issue, but when evasive maneuvering is needed the problem is apparent even at relatively low speeds. Tests have shown that using standard emergency avoidance procedures, such as turning the vehicle in one direction and then immediately back in the other at 30 mph can cause a fully loaded 15-passenger van to rollover.

Average drivers are not prepared for the changes in steering and handling as the weight is increased in the vehicle. This is the second reason for the increased rollover potential. Even experienced drivers have difficulty maintaining control of 15 passenger vans in emergencies.

All drivers and passengers of university vehicles must comply with Business Procedures D-4-1, D-4-3, D-9-1, D-9-6, and E-14-2.

Additional guidance is provided in the UK Risk Management Department (RM) document "Safe Vehicle Operations Guidelines: Department Head Responsibilities".



VehicleOperationGuidelines.doc

The following requirements and recommendations are excerpts from the aforementioned Business Procedures, RM document, as well as consensus guidelines. They are provided to enhance the operational safety of 15-passenger vans.

1. The driver must have a current driver's license, preferably from Kentucky.
2. The driver should not be approved to drive a University vehicle if their license has been suspended, revoked, modified or has more than 6 points charged against it within the past 5 years.
3. Students or student athletes should not drive team vehicles.
4. Drivers should have completed a driver's training class or a vehicle safety awareness training class within the past year.
5. Driver's must be at least 21 years of age and should have experience with the handling characteristics of these vehicles.
6. Tires should be inspected for wear condition and proper air pressure at the beginning and during breaks of each trip.
7. All occupants of the van must wear seat belts at all times.
8. When possible, no more than nine (9) persons (8 passengers plus driver) should be transported. That number should be reduced by one for each 170 pounds of luggage or equipment.
9. Drivers must not exceed posted speed limits.
10. The use of roof racks should be avoided.
11. All heavy storage should be located ahead of the rear axle. Passengers should not be seated in seats behind the rear axle.
12. On trips of more than four hours, rest stops should be taken at least every two and one half-hours.
13. Driving after 11:30 P.M. should be discouraged.