

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS, FAYETTEVILLE VAN SAFETY ADVISORY & USE OF 15-PASSENGER VANS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently reported that passenger vans with ten or more occupants had a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes of nearly three times the rate of lightly loaded vans. In most of the severe accident cases, an inexperienced driver was behind the wheel. Driving too fast for road conditions was also deemed a contribution. See the reminders below of the following safety precautions intended to reduce the likelihood of being involved in a serious accident while operating a passenger van:

1. Vans are more likely to tip over due to their higher center of gravity.

- Reduce your speed BELOW the speed limit posted for all turns. In addition, try to avoid steering with sudden or jerky motions.

2. Passenger vans have larger blind spots than passenger cars.

- Adjust your mirrors so that you can see the side of your van in your side mirrors and use convex (bubble) mirrors (if available) to increase your field of view.
- Before changing lanes, you should always check for blind spots by first leaning forward in your seat to change your sight angle and then by turning your head.

3. Vans are heavier than passenger cars especially when loaded with passengers.

- Allow more time and distance when pulling into traffic than you would if operating a passenger car.
- Use a 4-second following distance between the van and the rear of the vehicle ahead.

4. Passenger vans are taller and longer than passenger cars.

- When exiting a tunnel or being passed by a large truck, grip the steering wheel firmly and be prepared for the van to be pushed by the wind.
- Check the height of your van before attempting to enter any parking deck to ensure that there is enough room to fit.

In addition to the above precautions, the following **Use of 15-Passenger Vans** policy is applicable:

1. Vans should be operated by experienced drivers who understand and are familiar with the handling characteristics of a loaded van. When renting vans from the University's fleet, drivers must either watch a 10-minute video at least once or have a commercial driver's license.
2. Seatbelts must be used by all occupants.
3. Vehicles must be equipped with good quality and properly inflated tires.
4. With the exception of vans that have been retrofitted to accommodate up to twelve (12) passengers, loads should be limited to a maximum of ten (10) occupants. **DO NOT ALLOW PASSENGERS OR HEAVY STORAGE BEHIND THE REAR AXLE.**
5. An authorized backup driver should be available for all trips over four (4) hours one way, or if a trip is expected to extend later than 2:00 a.m. Rest stops every two (2) hours are also recommended.
6. Drivers shall maintain adequate distance between vehicles since additional braking/stopping distance is required for loaded vehicles that size.
7. Towing trailers and using roof racks for storage should not be utilized.
8. Van drivers shall not use a cell phone unless the van is safely stopped off the roadway.
9. Cruise control should not be used on rainy, snowy, or icy roads. Vans should be operated at or below posted speed limits.

Risk Management recommends that, whenever possible, smaller vans, mini-vans or mini-buses be used instead of 15-passenger vans.

Tips from NHTSA's on 12-Passenger Van Safety

1. **Experience:** 12 passenger vans should only be driven by experience, licensed drivers who operate this vehicle on a regular basis. It's important to know that 12-passenger vans handle differently than cars, especially when fully loaded.
2. **Attention:** Stay focused on the task of safe driving by being well rested, never using a handheld phone at the wheel, and limiting conversation with other passengers. Drivers shouldn't drive more than 8 hours per day.
3. **Speed:** Always obey the posted speed limit and reduce your speed as needed based on road or weather conditions. Remember that 12-passenger vans require additional braking time and cannot handle abrupt maneuvers the way cars can.
4. **Seat Belts:** All occupants always need to wear seat belts. Inspect seat belts regularly and replace any missing, broken, or damaged belts and/or buckles. An unrestrained occupant in a van is 4x more likely to be killed than a restrained occupant.
5. **Tire Pressure:** Inspect the tires and check tire pressure before each use. A van's tires, including the spare tire, need to be properly inflated and the tread should not be worn down. Excessively worn or improperly inflated tires can lead to a loss of vehicle control and possibly a rollover. Check the driver's side door pillar or the owner's manual for the recommended tire size and pressure. Recommended tire pressure may be different for front and back tires.
6. **Spares:** All tires weaken with age – even unused tires; avoid using an old spare on a 12-passenger van. Check your tires age by finding its Tire Identification Number (TIN) on the tire's sidewall. The last four digits of the TIN indicate the week and year the tire was made (e.g. 1010= March 2010)
7. **Occupancy:** Never allow more than 12 people to ride in a 12-passenger van. Fill the seats from front to back: when the van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.
8. **Cargo:** Cargo should be placed forward of the rear axle; avoid overloading the van or placing any loads on the roof. See the vehicles owner manual for maximum weight of passengers and cargo and to determine towing capability.
9. **Size:** A 12-passenger van is substantially longer and wider than a car, and thus requires more space to maneuver. It also requires additional reliance on the side-view mirrors for changing lanes.