

15-Passenger Van Safety

Fifteen-passenger vans are more likely to be involved in single-vehicle rollover crashes than any other type of vehicle. In response, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued numerous safety advisories on these vehicles.

The good news is that such consumer alerts and educational efforts are apparently working to help reduce fatalities. Statistics show the number of deaths in 15-passenger van rollover crashes has been declining steadily since 2001. Still, these vehicles pose a safety risk to occupants, claiming the lives of 58 people in accidents in 2006.

Still, more can be done to alert operators about the vehicles' high center of gravity—particularly when fully loaded—and ways to reduce chances of rollover. NHTSA continues to get the word out about this increased rollover risk, as well as what can be done to mitigate it.

Electronic Stability Control

Electronic Stability Control (ESC) is an on-board crash avoidance system designed to help the driver stay in control during an emergency maneuver like sudden swerving or braking. Results from a limited NHTSA study indicate that ESC installed in 15-passenger vans may have important safety benefits in some, but not all, on-road driving situations. As a result, ESC is a standard feature in all 15-passenger vans purchased after 2006. However, organizations that use 15-passenger vans to transport students, seniors, sports groups or other members, should still be aware of how to reduce rollover risks, avoid potential dangers, and better protect occupants in the event of a rollover crash.

NHTSA-recommended 15-passenger van safety precautions include the following:

- Keep your passenger load light. NHTSA research indicates that rollover risk increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases. In fact, risk of rollover increases 9 to 12 percent per added occupant. In single-vehicle crashes, 15-passenger vans transporting ten or more occupants had a rollover rate nearly three times that of vans carrying fewer than 5.
- Inspect tires and check pressure before each use. Tires need to be properly inflated and the tread should not be worn down. Fatal rollovers of 15-passenger vans are most likely to involve tire failure, since excessively worn or improperly inflated tires can lead to loss of vehicle control and ultimately a rollover. A NHTSA study found that 74 percent of all 15-passenger vans had improperly inflated tires. Improperly inflated tires can change handling characteristics, increasing the prospect of a rollover crash.
- Require all occupants to use their seat belts or the appropriate child restraint. Fifteen-passenger vans have bench seats that can accommodate 3-4 people, but often only the outboard seats have lap/shoulder belts. A federal government rule issued in December 2004 requires lap/shoulder belts at all seating positions in new passenger

vehicles, including 15-passenger vans. Passenger restraints should be inspected periodically. The driver and all passengers should be required to wear lap/shoulder belts whenever the vehicle is in motion. Nearly 80 percent of those who have died in 15-passenger vans were not buckled up. Wearing seat belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash.

- If at all possible, remove the rear seat. Ensure that passengers and cargo are placed forward of the rear axle. Avoid placing any loads on the roof. By following these guidelines you'll lower the vehicle's center of gravity, improve handling characteristics and reduce chances of a crash.
- Be mindful of speed and road conditions. The risk of rollover increases significantly at speeds over 50 miles per hour and on curved roads. Drivers should always observe posted speed limits and be extra cautious when driving on unfamiliar roads, especially at night or during bad weather.
- Only qualified drivers should be behind the wheel. Training and experience are required to safely operate any vehicle. Make sure that all 15-passenger van drivers have both. Also make sure that drivers are well rested, fully alert and not under the influence of alcohol, drugs or prescription medication.

Fleet Safety Program

A fleet safety program is recommended to facilitate the training of all drivers who operate 15-passenger vans. Take a proactive

approach. At a minimum your program should include topics such as:

- Company Safe Driving Policy
 - Use of electronic devices
 - Alcohol and drug policy
 - Seatbelts
- Driver qualification and record checks
- Driver Training
 - Including the dangers of 15-passenger vans
- Tracking and rewarding safe driving behavior
- Written driver agreements
- Accident reporting
- Vehicle inspection and maintenance

All aspects of your fleet safety program should be reviewed on an annual basis and updated as needed. Please contact your Hanover Risk Solutions Consultant for assistance with your fleet safety program. You may also download free safety information from www.hanoverrisksolutions.com.

For free copies of 15-passenger van safety hangtags, as well as the latest NHTSA research and analysis, please visit their web site: <http://www.safercar.gov/Vehicle+Shoppers/Passenger+Van+Safety>. You may also contact NHTSA's Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888-327-4236.

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