



Risk Management Best Practice

Line of Business: Auto

Subject: 15-Passenger Vans

Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to describe the best practices involved with the operation of owned or rented 15-passenger vans.

Recommendations:

Background: 15-passenger vans first appeared on the US market in the 1970s with extended bodies placed on a cargo van chassis with seating for 15 passengers. From 1997 to 2009 there were 1,274 fatalities involving 15-passenger vans of which 619 (49%) involved single vehicle rollover accidents.*



15-passenger vans are still used today for a variety of purposes and according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, on July 1, 2010, there were approximately 497,000 15-passenger vans registered in the United States.

Rollover Potential: 15-passenger vans have a high center of gravity thereby making them top heavy and thus more prone to rollover accidents. The additional weight of passengers shifts more weight upwards and towards the rear which contributes to the chances of a rollover.

Tire Blowouts: Excessive weight on the rear tires and underinflated tires has resulted in blowouts leading to accidents. Underinflated tires increase tire temperature, wear and tear, and can reduce stability.

Inexperienced Drivers: Many 15-passenger vans are operated by drivers with little or no training on how to load and drive them properly. Most states do not require a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) as long as the 15-passenger van is not being driven for profit.

Basic Exposure Controls: The items listed below can be viewed upon as the key best practices for organizations to follow.

- **Risk Avoidance** - Plan on phasing out the use of 15-passenger vans. Despite safety improvements made in the past several years (electronic stability control, traction control, anti-lock brakes, and rollover airbags) public entities should look to alternative vehicles to fit their transportation requirements.
- **Drivers** - Drivers should be at least 21 years old and must be trained in the use of 15-passenger vans including behind-the-wheel road tests. Only trained drivers should be allowed to operate the vans. Drivers must be accustomed to the size of the vehicle which affects backing, turning radius, blind spots, and braking. When backing, consider using a spotter.
- **Passenger Loads** - Limit the capacity of the vans to no more than 10 occupants (including the driver). According to the National Transportation Safety Board, 15-passenger vans are three times more likely to rollover when there are more than 10 occupants in the van.
- **Seatbelts** - Make sure every occupant has a seatbelt that is fully functional.
- **Mirrors** - The largest blind spot is directly behind the van. Adjust the mirrors so the driver can barely see the edge of the van. When changing lanes, check the blind spot by leaning forward to change the sight line and turn head to view lane.
- **Speed** - Prohibit operators from driving faster than 60 mph.
- **Trailers** - Drivers are prohibited from pulling trailers with 15-passenger vans.
- **Loading** - Prohibit loading heavy items in the rear of the van. Always load the van from front to rear, and do not place loads on the roof of the van.
- **Tires** - Inspect tires before each use as part of the pre-trip inspection process. Check tire pressures before each trip and make sure they are inflated to manufacturer's specifications (usually located on the door sill of the van).
- **Driver Distractions** - As with the operation of all vehicles in your fleet, drivers are prohibited from texting or talking on cell phones per your cell phone policy. This should also include the adjustment of navigational devices (GPS) during the operation of the van. Drivers should also avoid all other activities that will divert their attention from driving (e.g. eating, drinking) and minimize interactions with passengers. Passengers should not use interior lights after dark while riding in the van.

*American Center for Van and Tire Safety

Additional Resources and References:

Managing Specialty Vehicle Risks - Safety & Health, National Safety Council
<http://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/managing-specialty-vehicle-risks-2>

CDL Requirements by State
<http://www.cdlnknowledge.com/cdl-requirements-state-by-state/>

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