

THE RISK OBSERVER

15-Passenger Van Safety Advisory

Fifteen-passenger vans are more likely to be involved in a single-vehicle rollover crash than any other type of vehicle. In response, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued an updated safety advisory on these vehicles. In fact, this 2005 advisory marks the 4th time in just five years that NHTSA has issued a safety warning on these vehicles.

The good news is that such consumer alerts and educational efforts are apparently working to help reduce fatalities in 15-passenger van rollover crashes. The proof is in the numbers; the percent of 15-passenger van occupant fatalities that occur as a result of rollover crashes is down from a high of 81% in 2000 to 52% in 2003.

Still, more needs to be done to alert operators of these vehicles' high center of gravity—particularly when fully loaded—and their increased chance of rollover. NHTSA is continuing to work to get the word out about this increased rollover risk, as well as what can be done to mitigate it.

Organizations that use 15-passenger vans to transport students, seniors, sports groups or other members, need to be informed about how to reduce rollover risks, avoid potential dangers, and better protect occupants in the event of a rollover crash.

These NHTA recommended 15-passenger van safety precautions include the following:

1. **Keep your passenger load light.** NHTSA research has shown that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases from fewer than five to more than ten. In fact, 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) had a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded.
2. **Check your van's tire pressure frequently — at least once a week.** A just-released NHTSA study found that 74 percent of all 15-passenger vans had improperly inflated tires. By contrast, 39 percent of passenger cars had improperly inflated tires. Improperly inflated tires can change handling characteristics, increasing the prospect of a rollover crash in 15-passenger vans.
3. **Require all occupants to use their seat belts or the appropriate child restraint.** Nearly 80% of those who have died nationwide in 15-passenger vans were not buckled up. Wearing seat belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash.
4. **If at all possible, seat passengers and place cargo forward of the rear axle, and avoid placing any loads on the roof.** By following these guidelines, you'll lower the vehicle's center of gravity and lower the chance of a rollover crash.
5. **Be mindful of speed and road conditions.** The 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.



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6. **Only qualified drivers should be behind the wheel.** Special training and experience are required to properly operate a 15-passenger van. Make sure your driver or drivers have both, and only operate these vehicles when well rested and fully alert.

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: www.nhtsa.gov. Hangtags can also be ordered at no cost by contacting NHTSA's Vehicle Safety Hotline directly at **888-327-4236**.15p11515



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