

15 Passenger Van Safety

1. GENERAL

Research conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has found that the risk of a rollover crash is greatly increased when 10 or more people ride in a 15 passenger van. This procedure is intended to establish minimum safety requirements for the use of large capacity passenger vans, regardless of the number of seats installed in the vans. It is applicable to faculty, staff, and students using such vans regardless of whether the vans are owned by a department, borrowed from the motor pool, or rented from a commercial vehicle rental agency. (Link to additional information from the NHTSA on risk reduction of large capacity van roll-over: <http://www.nhtsa.gov/hot/15passvans/>)

Large-capacity vans, those typically referred to as 10-15 passenger vans, are commonly used by the faculty, staff, and students of University of Houston. These vans are often significantly larger than normal passenger cars and trucks. Under Texas law, drivers of these vans are not required to possess commercial driver's licenses.

2. VEHICLE MAINTENANCE AND RESTRICTIONS

2.1 All vans must be regularly maintained and kept in a roadworthy condition. University owned vans (borrowed from the University fleet or owned by departments) should meet the maintenance standards established by the State of Texas. Maintenance on vans obtained through a rental company is the responsibility of that rental company.

2.2 A van's gross vehicle weight should not exceed the manufacturer's recommendations. Gross vehicle weight includes driver, passengers, empty vehicle, and cargo weights. Consult the vehicle owner manual or the Texas Department of Public Safety, as appropriate, for specific capacity weight provisions. (Refer to the example that follows for a guide in determining load limits for 15- passenger vans.)

Luggage or equipment carried on top of the vehicle is strongly discouraged and should only be used if absolutely necessary. The weight of luggage or equipment transported on top of a vehicle (including the carrier or rack) should generally be 150 pounds or less and must never exceed the manufacturer's recommendations. The total permissible cargo weight includes the weight of any cargo carried on top of the vehicle.

2.3 Trailers may be towed provided that the towing capacity and the trailer tongue-weight (hitch weight) under loaded conditions meet the manufacturer's recommendations. **Maximum towing capacity includes both the empty trailer and the trailer cargo weights.** The vehicle operator must be aware that towing a fully loaded trailer will adversely affect the stopping distance of the vehicle and may alter the normal handling characteristics of the vehicle.

2.4 Luggage/cargo carried inside the van should be packed as close to the floor as possible. Stacking luggage or cargo above the level of the van seat backs should be avoided. When unavoidable, the luggage/cargo should be restrained as necessary to secure those items against shifting or falling in the event of an accident. Heavily loaded vans should have the load distributed evenly. Avoid excessive loading behind the rear axle of the van.

2.5 It is recommended that each vehicle traveling outside of Harris County be equipped with the following:

- An ABC-type fire extinguisher (2.5 pound or greater),
- A cellular telephone.

2.6 Travel into Mexico requires additional insurance beyond the existing fleet insurance policy. Contact the Risk Management Administrator for more information.

3. DRIVER QUALIFICATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS

3.1 Drivers must be at least 18 years of age.

3.2 Drivers must possess and carry at least a valid Texas Class CM Commercial Operator's License (or equivalent license issued from another state).

3.3 The Drivers MVR Record must be approved by the Environmental Health and Risk Management Department, and on file with the Fleet Coordinator.

4. PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS

4.1 The number of passengers (including the driver) should not exceed the number of working seat belts in the vehicle.

4.2 All passengers should be properly seated with seat belts fastened at any time the vehicle is in motion.

4.3 Transport of children less than six (6) years of age should be in accordance with occupant protection laws of the appropriate state.

4.4 Passenger behavior that may distract the driver should be avoided.