

Church Vans

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(This article is intended to be a brief, but informative overview of the safety recommendations for the use of church vans.)

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued an unprecedented four (4) safety advisories related to the use of 15 passenger vans in the last five years (2001, 2002, 2004 and 2005). The basis for this is the documented high probability of rollovers resulting in injuries and death with loaded 15 passenger vans. Every Church must examine carefully their use of 15 passenger vans in light of the alarming statistics.

Number of Crashes, Rollovers, and Rollover Ratios by Occupancy Level of 15-Passenger Vans in Single Vehicle Accidents

occupancy level	crashes	rollovers	rollover ratio	rollover ratios (1-9 occupants and 10 or more occupants)
less than 5	1,815	224	12.3%	12.7%
5 to 9	77	16	20.8%	
10 to 15	55	16	29.1%	35.4%
more than 15	10	7	70%	

NHTSA safety recommendations

The NHTSA makes the following recommendations to reduce the rollover risk associated with 15-passenger vans:

1. Fewer than 10 occupants.
2. Load occupants from the front of the van.
3. Each occupant is required to wear a seat belt at all times. The van owner should adopt a written seatbelt policy, and drivers should be informed that they are personally responsible for enforcing it. Nearly 80 percent of those killed in 15-passenger van rollovers in 2000 were not wearing seatbelts.
4. Absolutely nothing loaded on the van roof.
5. Van drivers should be well rested.
6. Drivers should drive cautiously (maintain a speed that is safe under the conditions, and be especially careful on rural and curved roads).
7. Inspect tires monthly to check for wear and proper inflation. Worn or improperly inflated tires increase the risk of a blowout. And, a 15-passenger's tendency to rollover increases dramatically during emergency maneuvers, such as a panic response to a tire blowout.
8. If the van's wheels drop off the roadway, gradually reduce speed and steer back onto the road when it is safe to do so.
9. Only use drivers who have received specific training on the use of 15-passenger vans. Several options are available, including a van driver certification course offered by the National Safety Council. This training should be repeated every three years.
10. Drivers should keep the van's gas tank as full as possible.