



SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT —  
BUSINESS AND FINANCE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
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VICE CHANCELLORS - ADMINISTRATION

Dear Colleagues:

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has determined that 15-passenger vans are unsafe in certain circumstances. Attachment I is a recent press release from the NHTSA that highlights the ways in which these vans are susceptible to rollover if not operated by experienced drivers. Attachment II is a related webpage that suggests ways to reduce safety risks, such as:

- allowing only experienced drivers to operate the vehicle;
- requiring passengers to wear seat belts at all times;
- properly maintaining van tires, including tire pressure;
- prohibiting roof loads, which raise the center of gravity and increase the likelihood of rollover;
- seating passengers in front of the rear axle when the van is partially full, and
- never carrying more than 15 riders (14 passengers plus driver).

Attachment III is the California Public Contract Code 10326.1, which goes into effect January 1, 2005. It will require that all state agencies discontinue purchase of 15-passenger vans and will restrict operation of those currently in stock to drivers holding a "Class B" (commercial) license. Please note that a 15-passenger van, which has been modified to reduce the number of seats, will still possess safety hazards and is still regulated under the law. While this law does not specifically apply to the University, the legislature has asked that The Regents adopt similar rules and regulations.

In order to prudently manage the risk associated with use of 15-passenger vans, please make the NHTSA material available to University employees and other personnel on your campus who either maintain, drive, rent or lease, or otherwise use these vehicles in University-related activities, so each becomes familiar with safe operation and potential dangers.

I also ask that:

- each campus consider a plan to phase out existing fleets as soon as possible (leased or owned);

- if the former cannot be completely accomplished by January 1, 2005, affected campuses should promulgate a requirement that all 15-passenger van drivers provide Class B licenses (and the requisite DMV endorsement), or implement training programs for all 15-passenger van drivers that meet or exceed Class B written and skills tests.

Financial Management will be collecting additional information on campus 15-passenger van fleets and operations, after which the Office of the President may issue additional information or requirements regarding training and licensing.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter. Questions regarding implementation of the above recommendations may be directed to Chief of Staff Colleen Nickles.

Sincerely,

--- Joe ---

Joseph P. Mullinix  
Senior Vice President

#### Attachments

cc: President Dynes  
Members, President's Cabinet  
Special Assistant Gardner  
General Counsel Holst  
Campus Risk Managers  
Campus Parking and Transportation Directors  
Campus Fleet Management Directors  
Interim Director Carletta

## ATTACHMENT I

### **NHTSA Repeats Rollover Warning To Users of 15-Passenger Vans**

The nation's top motor vehicle safety executive, Jeffrey Runge, M.D., head of the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), today reissued a cautionary warning to users of 15-passenger vans because of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions. A similar warning was issued in 2001.

The safety agency also unveiled a consumer flyer for users of 15-passenger vans.

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.

"Because of these risks, it is vital that users of 15-passenger vans be aware of some safety precautions that will significantly reduce the risk," said Dr. Runge.

- Among the recommendations are the following:
- It is important that 15-passenger vans be operated by trained, experienced drivers.
- Insist that all occupants wear seat belts at all times. Eighty percent of those who died in 15-passenger van rollovers nationwide in the year 2000 were not buckled up. Wearing seat belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash. In fatal, single-vehicle rollovers involving 15-passenger vans over the past decade, 92 percent of belted occupants survived.

NHTSA is reissuing this advisory to specifically alert summertime users of 15-passenger vans. The agency also has prepared a flyer on 15-passenger van safety that is available on the web at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/Hot/15PassVans/index.htm>. The agency also is considering the potential benefits of an additional warning label about rollover and seat belt use that would be visible to the driver and passengers of 15-passenger vans, respectively.

While federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students, no such prohibition exists for vehicles to transport college students or other passengers.

A copy of the NHTSA analysis of the rollover characteristics of 15-passenger vans can be found at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-30/ncsa/AvailInf.html> under "Research Notes". The new consumer advisory also is available at: [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/).

(this document may be found online at:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2002&filename=pr27-02.html>)

## ATTACHMENT II

### REDUCING THE RISK OF ROLLOVER CRASHES IN 15-PASSENGER VANS

Fifteen-passenger vans typically have seating positions for a driver and 14 passengers. They are widely used by community organizations to take members on short trips and outings. Colleges use them to drive sports teams to intercollegiate games and vanpools use them for commuters.



#### **What increases the risk of rollover crashes?**

Recent 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 increased risk occurs because the passenger weight raises the vehicle's center of gravity and causes it to shift rearward. As a result, the van has less resistance to rollover and handles differently from other commonly driven passenger vehicles, making it more difficult to control in an emergency situation. Placing any load on the roof also raises the center of gravity and increases the likelihood of a rollover.

#### **What situations can cause a rollover?**

A rollover crash is a complex event, heavily influenced by driver and road characteristics as well as the design of the vehicle. In studies of single-vehicle crashes, NHTSA has found that more than 90 percent of rollovers occur after a driver has lost control of the vehicle and has run off the road. Three major situations can lead to a rollover in a 15-passenger van.

- **The van goes off a rural road.** If this occurs, the van is likely to overturn when it strikes a ditch or embankment or when it is tripped by an object or runs onto soft soil.
- **The driver is fatigued or driving too fast for conditions.** A tired driver can doze off and lose control. The driver can also lose control when traveling at a high speed causing the van to slide sideways off the road. The grassy or dirt medians that line highways can often cause the van to overturn when the tires dig into the dirt.
- **The driver overcorrects the steering as a panic reaction to an emergency or to a wheel dropping off the pavement.** Especially at freeway speeds, this situation can cause the driver to lose control, resulting in the van sliding sideways and rolling over.

#### **What can organizations do to protect their passengers?**

Over the past decade, 80 percent of people killed in rollover crashes in 15-passenger vans were unbelted. Passengers can dramatically reduce their risk of being killed or seriously injured in a rollover crash by simply

using their seat belts. Organizations that own 15-passenger vans should have a written seat belt use policy. Drivers should be responsible for enforcing the policy.

Seat belt use is especially critical because large numbers of people die in rollover crashes when they are partially or completely thrown from the vehicle. NHTSA estimates that people who wear their seat belts are about 75 percent less likely to be killed in a rollover crash than people who don't.

#### **Does an experienced driver make a difference?**

Significant differences in the design and handling characteristics of a 15-passenger van make it drive differently from other passenger vehicles. Therefore, an organization that owns a 15-passenger van should select one or two experienced drivers to drive the van on a regular basis. These drivers will gain valuable experience handling the van. This experience will help make each trip a safe one.

#### **How can rollover crashes be prevented?**

Because most rollover crashes don't involve other vehicles, they are often preventable. Here are some tips for drivers to minimize the risk of a rollover crash and serious injury:

- **Avoid conditions that lead to a loss of control.** Never drive while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Make sure you are well rested and attentive, and always slow down if the roads are wet or icy.
- **Drive cautiously on rural roads.** Be particularly cautious on *curved* rural roads and maintain a safe speed to avoid running off the road.
- **Know what to do if your wheels drop off the roadway.** If your wheels drop off the roadway, or pavement, *gradually* reduce speed and steer back onto the roadway when it is safe to do so.
- **Properly maintain your tires.** Make sure your tires are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down. Worn tires can cause your van to slide sideways on wet or slippery pavement. Improper inflation can cause handling problems and can lead to catastrophic tire failures, such as blowouts. Therefore, check tire pressure and treadwear once a month.

#### **What are other considerations for safe driving?**

When a 15-passenger van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.

More than 15 people should never be allowed to ride in a 15-passenger van.

Because a 15-passenger van is substantially longer and wider than a car, it:

- Requires more space and additional reliance on the side-view mirrors for changing lanes
- Does not respond as well to abrupt steering maneuvers
- Requires additional braking time.

## "15 Passenger Van Rollover Information"

- NHTSA Repeats Rollover Warning To Users of 15-Passenger Vans ([Press Release](#))
- "Reducing The Risk of Rollover Crashes in 15-Passenger Vans" - Flyer ([PDF - Laser Resolution](#))
- "Reducing The Risk of Rollover Crashes in 15-Passenger Vans" - Hangtag  
([PDF - Laser Resolution](#)) ([PDF - Printing-Press Resolution](#)) ([Spanish HTML](#))

## ATTACHMENT III

### **Public Contract Code 10326.1.**

(a) A campus or a facility of a California Community College or a campus or a facility of the California State University, that owns, leases, or otherwise has possession or control of a 15-passenger van, may not, on or after January 1, 2005, authorize the operation of that van for the purpose of transporting passengers unless the person driving or otherwise operating that van has both of the following:

(1) A valid class B driver's license, as provided in Division 6 (commencing with Section 12500) of the Vehicle Code, issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles.

(2) An endorsement for operating a passenger transportation vehicle, as provided in Article 6 (commencing with Section 15275) of Chapter 7 of Division 6 of the Vehicle Code, issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles.

(b) (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), for purposes of this section, a "15-passenger van" means any van manufactured to accommodate 15 passengers, including the driver, regardless of whether that van has been altered to accommodate fewer than 15 passengers.

(2) For purposes of this section, a "15-passenger van" does not mean a 15-passenger van with dual rear wheels that has a gross weight rating equal to, or greater than, 11,500 pounds.

(c) The Legislature recommends that the Regents of the University of California adopt rules and regulations similar to the provisions contained in this section.