



NTSB

SAFETY ALERT

National Transportation Safety Board

★ 15-Passenger Vans

***Follow these safety precautions if you own
or ride in a 15-passenger van***

The grim facts

- Between 1994 and 2004, there were 1,512 fatal crashes involving 15-passenger vans.
- A total of 642 of these were single-vehicle crashes; 515 of the vehicles rolled over.
- In 2004 alone, 120 occupants of 15-passenger vans died in crashes involving these vehicles.
- More than half of the 15-passenger vans involved in single-vehicle accidents rolled over, compared to one-third of passenger cars.
- Eighty-one percent of crash-related occupant deaths in 15-passenger vans occur in single-vehicle rollover accidents.

The problems

- Large vans are frequently used to transport college and other school sports teams, commuters, students, day care children, the elderly, and church groups.
- A major problem with 15-passenger vans is that their tires are often underinflated, leading to higher tire temperatures, faster tire deterioration, and diminished driving stability.
- Adding passengers and cargo causes the center of gravity to move upward and rearward, increasing a vehicle's tendency to roll over and increasing the potential for the driver to lose control in emergency maneuvers.
- Fifteen-passenger vans are 3 times more likely to roll over when loaded with more than 10 passengers.
- In just two 15-passenger van crashes alone, in North Carolina and Texas in 2001, a teenager and four senior citizens died when left rear tires failed, the drivers lost control of the vehicles, and the vans rolled over several times.

What can you do to make a trip in a 15-passenger van safer?

- Beware! Front and back tires may require different inflation pressures and these pressures may be higher than those of passenger car tires. Car tire pressures are typically **28-32 lbs.** and the same for all 4 tires. However, van tires are **very different** with typically up to **50 lbs.** in the front tires and up to **80 lbs.** in the rear tires. The manufacturer's recommended pressure is usually provided on the driver's doorsill or in the owner's manual.

- Always check the conditions of the tires. Examine tires for uneven wear, cracks, and damage, and replace them if necessary. Many of these 15-passenger vans are not continuously driven like a family car. Exposure to sunlight and sitting parked for long periods can lead to deadly tire degradation and dry rot.
- It is critical to remember that low mileage doesn't mean tires are safe. Unfortunately, dangerously deteriorated tires cannot always be detected by visual inspection alone.
- Wear seat belts! Keep all seat belts accessible and require that all passengers use them. NTSB accident investigations show that several of the van passengers who died might not have lost their lives if they had been wearing seat belts. They were ejected from the 15-passenger vans when the vehicles rolled over.
- Inspect seat belts and replace missing buckles, as well as broken and worn belts. Seat belts are often forgotten when they are out of sight and wedged between the seat bottom and seat back.
- Be aware that van drivers need additional training since these vans handle differently than other vehicles, especially when they are fully loaded.
- Remember that in emergencies, vans react differently than a family car. Make all drivers of these vans aware that the handling characteristics of vans are different, especially during an emergency like a tire blow out.
- Do not overload 15-passenger vans, and do not use a roof rack or strap on cargo to the back of the van. As the weight inside a van increases, so does the van's propensity to roll over.
- *Highway safety experts at the NTSB strongly suggest you use these safety tips and pass along this information to organizations that use 15-passenger vans.*

Need more information?

- Visit the NTSB Web site, www.nts.gov, for the following accident reports:
- *15-Passenger Van Single-Vehicle Rollover*, Henrietta, Texas, May 8, 2001 and Randleman, North Carolina, July 1, 2001.
- *15-Passenger Child Care Van Run-Off-Road Accident*, Memphis, Tennessee, April 4, 2002.
- *Highway Accident Brief: 15-Passenger Van Median Crossover and Impact with Truck*, Joliet, Illinois, January 26, 2001.