

15 Passenger Van Safety



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Introduction

Hi capacity vans are a breed of their own. Their ability to handle well is greatly diminished due to their high center of gravity if a panic maneuver is encountered. To compound the lack of handling, add to the mix is weather. High winds, rain, snow are factors when driving a 15 passenger van. The ability to plan a trip ahead of time knowing what the weather forecast will be can save lives. Another factor to take into account are road conditions. Slow down and drive cautiously, especially on rural roads. Shoulders, ditches and embankments, as well as on and off ramps, create the potential for vehicle roll over. Reduce speed below the speed limit posted for all turns and poor road conditions. Remember, the posted speed limit is safe for cars, NOT 15- passenger vans.

Not only is it important to know the driving and handling characteristics of 15 passenger vans It is a best practice for municipalities who have high passenger vans in their fleet to have a Fleet Safety Program. In this best practice we will outline what you should consider when creating a comprehensive Fleet Safety Program.

The program should contain the following elements:

- Written Program
- Program Administration
- Driver Selection
- Criteria Evaluation
- Training
- Discipline
- Drug and Alcohol Testing
- Emergency Equipment
- Vehicle Dangers
- Vehicle Inspection
- Vehicle Maintenance & Recordkeeping
- Passengers & Loading and Unloading
- Cargo
- Vehicle use
- Driving Conditions
- Accident Reporting and Analysis

Written Program

It is a best practice to create a Fleet Safety Program. Your program first should have a Safety Mission Statement that outlines the department's commitment to safety. It should outline what is expected of drivers who operate department vehicles in a safe manner and how the department will provide a safe environment for all passengers under the supervision of the drivers. As part of this program, the department should have a policy of conducting safety committee meetings with drivers on a regular basis as a mechanism to bring any safety concerns to the Department Manager. During safety committee

meetings with drivers, it is a best practice to establish an annual safety goal and a written action plan as to how drivers can obtain the goal. By creating and following the action plan, it will provide drivers with a safety focal point to keep safety on the forefront at all times. Safety goals and action plans should be an agenda item and reviewed at each meeting.

There should be a policy on use of personal vehicles for municipal business there should be guidelines for volunteers, part time or seasonal drivers your program should outline what is expected during the use of personal vehicle for municipal business and establishes a minimum requirement for insurance coverage. Your program should prohibit of personal use of municipal vehicles by authorized drivers and by family members and others.

Program Administration

You should designate a person (HR or Safety Manager) who has the overall responsibility for the Program administration including:

1. Overseeing development and implementation of a Fleet Safety Program,
 - Obtaining MVRs pre-employment and annually thereafter for all operators of 15 passenger vans (*Full-time, part-time, seasonal, and volunteers.*),
 - Compliance with Maine Teen Employment Laws regarding vehicles,
 - Adopting a set of fair and responsible standards for all drivers,
 - Establishing acceptable driving records as a condition of employment,
 - Auditing periodically for department compliance.

Department heads should be responsible for compliance with the program within their department, including:

- Ensuring that all operators have the required license for the type of vehicle being operated,
- Conducting or providing driver training for all operators,
- Adopting a set of fair and responsible standards for all drivers,
- Maintaining operation and maintenance files for each vehicle,
- Ensuring that pre-trip and post-trip inspections are being conducted and documented.

Drivers Responsibilities

- Adhering to all policies and procedures governing the operation of their vehicle,
- Maintaining a professional appearance,
- Ensuring safe operation of all vehicles and equipment,

- Conducting and documenting required pre-trip and post-trip inspections, including defect reports,
- Submitting any accident reports,
- Submitting a copy of current driver' license for obtaining Motor Vehicle Record (MVR),
- Keeping the Supervisor or designee advised of changes in license or driving status,
- Prohibiting use of assigned vehicle by anyone not authorized to drive the Municipal vehicle.

Driver hiring and selection

There should be a driver hiring / selection process. Careful attention should be paid during this process. 15 passenger vans are substantially longer and wider than a car. Requires more space and additional reliance on the side mirrors for changing lanes and they do not respond safely to abrupt steering maneuvers.

Only authorized drivers should be allowed to operate this type of vehicle. The authorization process should include full-time, part-time, seasonal employees and volunteers.

- When vehicle operation is a required job duty of a position it should be stated clearly in the written job description for the position.
- Authorized drivers must possess a valid driver's license of the proper type and class of vehicle.
- Obtain MVRs on all new employee applicants prior to hiring. If their duties will include driving on behalf of the municipality, they should meet predetermined standards.
- Establish an acceptable driving record as a condition of employment up front.
- Adopt for all drivers a set of standards that is fair and responsible. Include disciplinary procedures that are appropriate for your entity and consistent with disciplinary procedures for other safety processes and labor policies. These must be clearly stated, written and enforced consistently.
- Evaluation of driver qualifications should include annual review of MVRs and may include observation of or demonstration of driver proficiency and job shadowing by an experienced driver.
- The selection process should include initial and periodic review of qualifications, operating records and driving ability.

Evaluation Criteria

Criteria (both on-the-job and off-job violations) that may be used to disqualify a person as an authorized driver may include:

- Three (3) or more moving violations in a 36 month period;
- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the last three years;

- Hit and Run accident;
- Failure to report an accident;
- Operating a vehicle under a suspended or revoked license;
- Homicide, assault or a felony arising from the operation of a motor vehicle;
- Reckless driving or “criminal speeding” violation in the last 3 years (Title 29-A, Sec. 2074);
- Driving without the municipalities consent
- Failure to obey or eluding an officer
- Falsifying an accident report
- Larceny involving a motor vehicle

It is a best practice that all drivers of 15 passenger vans must be at least 21 years old and have a minimum of 5 years of licensed driving experience.

Training

Effective January 1, 2007 the Board of Occupational Safety and Health requires documented certified training for all public employees who operate full-size vans. Certification of operators includes hands-on exercise and Refresher training at a minimum not to exceed 3 years.

Training should consist of a combination of formal instruction (e.g., lecture, discussion, interactive computer learning, video/DVD or written material), practical training (demonstrations performed by the trainer and practical exercises performed by the trainee), and evaluation of the operator's driving skill performance.

Initial training should consist of the following:

- Divers should receive training on your disciplinary procedures
- Use of safety devices &
- Equipment familiarization
- Routes & schedules
- Defensive driving techniques
- Local, State % Federal Regs.
- Cargo Securement
- Vehicle Training, Inspection and Maintenance.

The best way to train individuals how to safely operate 15 passenger vans is to provide actual behind the wheel training from an experienced driver. Topics that should be addressed during 15 passenger van driver training should include most, if not all, of the following topics:

- Driving with your lights on
- Using your mirrors frequently
- Use your turn signals
- Giving other vehicles the right of way

- Not frequently passing other vehicles
- Driving below the speed limit
- Staying primarily in the right lane
- Avoiding all aggressive driving maneuvers
- Staying focused / no distractions
- Avoid backing whenever possible
- Use of a spotter when backing if needed
- Knowing where the blind spot is when backing

The municipality should certify that each operator has been trained and evaluated as recommended by Maines Full Size Van Training Compliance Directive dated 8/2016. The certification shall include the name of the operator, the date of the training, the date of the evaluation, and the identity of the person(s) performing the training or evaluation.

Driver Discipline

Any driver who does not maintain an acceptable standard should be coached and corrective actions taken as outlined in the municipal employee disciplinary process.

Adherence to the Fleet Safety Policy should be considered in performance reviews and other personnel decisions to hold drivers accountable for their actions. Always remember, your municipal seal on your vehicles is a bill board going down the road.

Drug and Alcohol Testing

Any driver who operates a passenger van that carries 15 passengers including the driver is not required to be enrolled in a random Drug and Alcohol Testing program. However it is a best practice to have your drivers enrolled in a program. As mentioned earlier, this may be used to disqualify a person as an authorized driver.

Emergency Equipment

Drivers should be trained in the proper use of all equipment. Vehicle restraint systems are to be maintained in an operable state and utilized by all drivers and passengers.

First aid kits, emergency signaling device and a fire extinguishers should be inspected daily during pre-trip inspections. First aid kits should be restocked as needed. Fire Extinguishers should be replaced if found defective at any time or during documented monthly inspections.

Vehicle Dangers

15 passenger vans are three times more likely to roll over when loaded with ten or more passengers. Increased speeds (35 mph or greater) greatly increase the risk of rollovers. 15 passenger van's center of gravity shifts up and to the back, increasing rollover risk during panic maneuvers by drivers. Slow down and drive cautiously, especially on rural roads. Shoulders, ditches and embankments, as well as on and off ramps, create the potential for vehicle roll over. Reduce your speed below the speed limit posted for all turns

and poor road conditions. Remember, the posted speed limit is safe for cars, NOT 15-passenger vans.

Overloading (passengers or cargo) greatly increase the risk of a roll over if a panic maneuver is encountered. Do not load items on top of the vehicle or tow a trailer. Do not overload the vehicle with passengers and/or equipment.

Passengers should be distributed evenly from side to side for balance and sit towards the front of the vehicle.

15 Passenger vans are difficult to control if a tire blows. Inexperienced drivers are far more likely to be involved in rollovers than experienced drivers.

Problems with tires are one of the leading causes in 15 passenger van rollovers. Tires that aren't regularly inspected are often past their service life and under-inflated. Under-inflated or overly-worn tires can lead to loss of vehicle control, which is a leading contributor to 15 passenger van rollovers. Tire pressure should be inspected before every use. Either the owner's manual or some place on the vehicle (commonly in the door jamb of the driver's door) lists the manufacturer's recommended tire pressure. Always follow the manufacturer's suggested tire pressure and never over- or under-inflate. As a best practice, it is recommended to equip all 15 passenger vans with a tire pressure gauge and make sure drivers check pressure before every use.

Vehicle Inspections

All 15 passenger vans should be equipped with a simple vehicle inspection log. The log should include the following information:

- Last driver to inspect vehicle
- Date of inspection
- Details of inspection

The inspection details should include documentation of defects found during inspection, date taken OOS and corrective action taken and date action was completed.

Vehicle Maintenance & Recordkeeping

Always follow manufacturer's recommendations when performing maintenance on vans. Recommendations for scheduled maintenance should be found the operators manual or user guide. Maintenance should be completed by qualified persons. Always keep vehicle maintenance records outlining what work was performed on file for the life of each vehicle. Recordkeeping should also include pre- and post-trip inspections, conducted and documented, with defects noted and reported to supervisor or mechanic; requires inspections including a review of all safety equipment; Require Mechanics and/or service providers to document completion of repairs. Not following MFG's recommendations when performing regular (scheduled) maintenance may diminish the safety performance and detract the value of the vehicle.

Passenger Loading and Unloading

Drivers should use good judgment to decide how, when and where to unload passengers safely. Always pick up and drop off passengers so that they do NOT have to cross traffic to get to their destination. Keep all passengers away from the front and rear of the vehicle when crossing. The use of a responsible spotter when loading, unloading, backing or parking is recommended to ensure no person or object is in harm's way.

Cargo

Misplaced cargo is often a contributing cause in 15 passenger van rollovers. Due to a 15 passenger van's high center of gravity, cargo should always be placed near the center of the vehicle and in front of the rear axle. Cargo should never be placed on the roof. 15 passenger vans should never be used to tow anything. Passengers should be seated closer to the front of the van and evenly distributed from side to side.

Vehicle Use

Drivers should abide by the following:

- MUST wear seat belts at ALL times
- Know van evacuation policy
- Ensure all passengers adhere to the terms of the Passenger Van Policy at all times
- Ensure all doors are locked and passengers are secured in the appropriate seating positions and are wearing seat belts
- Cell phones are for emergencies only, and are to be used only when the van is safely parked
- No food, drinks or smoking is allowed
- Reading while driving is prohibited
- Read maps only when the van is safely parked

Drivers should be patient and courteous at all times. Road rage is strictly prohibited. Your passengers count on you to be cool and keep them safe at all times during travel. Aggressive driving is prohibited. Passing when unsafe, tailgating, excessive lane changes, blocking traffic and speeding are signs of aggressive driving which puts you as the driver and you passengers in danger. It also endangers the lives of other drivers on the road and it's a poor reflection on your municipality.

To Avoid Road Rage in Others

- Do not cut people off
- Do not tailgate
- Use turn signals
- Do not use inappropriate gestures or verbal taunts
- Use horn sparingly
- Allow other drivers to merge



- Drive courteously

If Confronted by an Angry Driver, do not make eye contact, do not engage in the confrontation, if they persist, have a passenger call for emergency help and drive to a police station.

- **Fatigue**
- Drivers must be well rested
 - Signs of fatigue-Excessive yawning and blinking
 - Difficulty focusing and keeping eyes open
 - Inattention and daydreaming
 - The only cure for fatigue is to sleep. Stop and rest for 15-30 minutes
 - Longer than 30 minutes is not advisable

Drivers experience more fatigue between midnight and 6 a.m. Be aware that 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. is a time when fatigue is common. On long trips, schedule rest stops every two hours. Drive during the day, if possible. Have someone awake in the front passenger seat

Backing-

- 70% of van crashes involve backing into a stationary object.
- Whenever possible, back out to the left (the driver's side) for better visibility
- Use outside mirrors to direct you. 15 passenger vans are longer and wider than most commonly driven vehicles and as a result they have much larger blind spots. If possible, it is best to always make use of a spotter when backing to aid in keeping the driver aware of the vehicle's surroundings.

Avoid backing into traffic. Get out and check the area behind the van before backing. Turn on four-way flashers and back SLOWLY. Have a spotter assist you to back ONLY when they understand what is expected of them. There is a blind spot in front of the van which may prevent operators from seeing children and others of short stature walking in front of the van. Be aware of a van passenger walking in front of the van as they board or exit the vehicle.

Driving Conditions

- Check weather conditions prior to any trip.
- Be prepared not to go if conditions are extreme
- Leave early to avoid making mistakes or becoming anxious
- Because of the van's size and shape, you must be especially mindful of crosswinds
- Crosswinds can be created by open fields, overpasses and bridges as well as exiting tunnels
- Crosswinds are also created by larger vehicles and buses



Rain - One of the most dangerous aspects of driving during rain is diminished visibility.

- 15 passenger vans already have reduced visibility due to their size and the presence of large blind spots.
- If heavy rain is observed or forecasted, canceling or delaying trips can eliminate the hazard.
- Focusing on keeping the windshield clear can draw focus from other areas and may lead to accidents.

Make sure all 15 passenger vans are equipped with working windshield wiper blades and that they are replaced frequently to ensure maximum effectiveness. Have the garage mechanic show you how to replace them if need be out on the road. Keep a spare set on hand at all times.

- **Fog** - is typically densest in the mornings so delaying trips to late morning or afternoon can eliminate the hazard. Keeping headlights on low beam will allow for maximum visibility. High beams will reflect off the fog and impair visibility more. Use wipers and defrosters to maintain maximum visibility.
- **Use the Road** - The edge of the road or painted road markings can be used effectively as a guide.
- **Be Patient** - Never pass another vehicle during foggy conditions

Reduce Speed - Fog can create the illusion of driving slower than in reality. Also with reduced visibility drivers will be less likely to see and react to hazards that may arise.

- **Winter Months** - Stopping will take much longer for 15 passenger vans during the winter months due to slippery road conditions. Always leave at least 3 times the space as usual between the car in front of you.
- **Braking** - Brake gently to avoid skidding. If skidding occurs and the wheels lock up slowly ease off the brake.
- **Lights** - Use lights during winter conditions to increase your visibility to other drivers.
- Bridges and Overpasses are areas that will be the first to freeze and become icy. Even at temperatures above freezing, if wet, these areas can develop ice.
- **Passing** - Passing other vehicles in 15 passenger vans is never advisable, but can be even more dangerous in winter weather. Never pass snow plows or sanding trucks. The drivers of these vehicles have limited visibility and the roads in front of them are typically much worse.

Snow and ice are the leading causes of weather-related deaths annually. Winter weather can decrease visibility and create slippery, dangerous driving conditions. Driving during extreme winter weather is not advisable, but roads can be dangerous at any time during the winter.

Accident Reporting & Analysis

- In the event of an accident, all representatives of the municipality should be guided by the following:
- First and foremost call 911
- Provide the dispatcher with as much information as possible so that the appropriate response to the situation can be made
- Be the last to hang up to make sure all dispatch questions are answered.

The driver should also request that all parties and property concerned remain at the scene of the accident until the accident investigation is completed by law enforcement. The involved employee(s) should refrain from making statements regarding the accident with anyone other than the investigating officer, municipal officials or municipal insurance company representatives. Statements should be confined to factual observations.

The involved employee(s) should follow guidelines established by the municipality for accident reporting and investigation. All collisions should be immediately reported to the supervisor and insurance contact person. The Maine Department of Labor (623-7900) must be notified within eight hours of a fatality and within twenty-four hours for a serious injury requiring overnight hospitalization.

Conclusion

As you can see there is a lot to take in to consideration when developing an all-encompassing 15 Passenger Van Fleet Safety Program. One of the best resources municipalities have are highly qualified drivers who can assist you with creating policies and standard operating procedures. By using your highly skilled drivers as a resource in the development of your program, you are more likely to get buy-in after you roll out and implement your program.

Other resources that may be used are safe operating procedures found in Operators Manuals. These safe operating procedures are from the manufacturer and are there for a reason. The overall goal is to create a Fleet Safety Program that is designed to prevent bodily, property and casualty claims. By preventing claims it leads to higher morale and productivity of the department.

This information is intended to assist you in your loss control efforts. "Best Practices" are developed from available current information but may not address every possible cause of loss. We do not assume responsibility for the elimination of all hazards that could possibly cause accidents or losses. Adherence to these recommendations does not guarantee the fulfillment of your obligation under local, state, or federal laws.