15-Passenger Van Safety Precautions

15-passenger vans are three times more likely to roll over when fully loaded. Adding passengers and cargo causes the center of gravity to move upward, increasing a vehicle’s tendency to roll over and increasing the potential for the driver to lose control in emergency maneuvers.

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 have a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded.

How can you make a trip in a 15-passenger van safer?

- Middlebury College will only allow 15-passenger vans to be filled to capacity for travel within 50 miles of Middlebury’s campus. More than 15 people should never be allowed to ride in a 15-passenger van.
- Vans travelling further than 50 miles from campus will have a reduced capacity of 11 occupants (driver plus 10 passengers).
- When the van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle. The rear seat should remain empty when possible. This lowers the vehicle’s center of gravity and lowers the chance of a rollover crash.
- Never exceed the posted speed limit. Drive at a safe speed based on driving conditions. Analysis of 15-passenger van crashes also shows that the risk of rollover increases significantly at speeds over 50 miles per hour and on curvy roads.
- Be particularly cautious on curved rural roads and maintain a safe speed to avoid running off the road.
- 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.
- Slow down if roads are wet or icy. 15-passenger vans do not respond well to abrupt steering maneuvers and require additional braking time.
- Drivers must be well-rested and attentive to driving at all times. Drivers are not permitted to use cell phones or GPS units at any time.
- All occupants must wear seatbelts at all times. Nearly 80% of those who died nationwide in 15-passenger vans were not buckled up.