



The Scoop

15-Passenger

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Because vans originally were designed to haul cargo, not people, they escaped safety-design requirements imposed on such vehicles as school buses. The result has been a trail of carnage. If you're driving a 15-passenger van, you need to be aware of these reported hazards:



Rollover Risks

Fifteen-passenger vans have a rollover risk similar to other light trucks and vans when carrying a small number of passengers, says the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

In issuing this warning, the NHTSA went on to advise that the risk of rollover triples as the number of occupants goes up to 10 or more. Loading the 15-passenger van causes its center of gravity to shift up and back. This shift also increases the potential for loss of control if the driver panics.

Only experienced drivers should operate these vans. Although not required to have a commercial driver's license, operators are urged



to attend the American Automobile Association's driver-improvement program before getting behind the wheel.

Drivers should understand and be familiar with the handling characteristics of 15-passenger vans, especially when they are fully loaded. You can lower the risk of rollover by buying only high-quality tires, keeping the gas tank full, and driving conservatively. You also should fill the front seats first. Never load anything on the roof.

If you're in a van that's involved in a

on Vans



rollover crash, your best chance of survival is to be wearing a seat belt. Eighty percent of those who died in such crashes in 2000 were not wearing a restraint. Drivers and passengers, alike, are required to wear seat belts at all times in 15-passenger vans.

If you have questions about the crash characteristics of 15-passenger vehicles, contact the NHTSA hotline at 1-888-327-4236 or visit their website at www.nhtsa.dot.gov.



Mishap investigators from the Naval Safety Center took this photo and the one at the top of the next column after a 15-passenger Navy van crashed.



Improper Replacement Tires



A random check of government-owned and leased 15-passenger vans in mid-2001 revealed some of them had improper replacement tires installed.

When tires don't meet the manufacturer's minimum requirements for size, pressure and load, you're asking for problems. Heat rapidly builds up in such cases, creating the potential for tire failure, which can cause a driver to lose control and wreck.

Before driving any 15-passenger van, check the federal certification label usually located on the driver's side door pillar. This label lists the vehicle's gross-weight load limits, minimum allowable tire size, and the cold-inflation pressure for the front and rear tires. You also can find the same information in the owner's manual, along with tips on loading the vehicle to prevent unstable driving conditions. Compare the recommended tire size and air pressure against what you actually find on the van (marked on the side of the tires).

Most 15-passenger vans require the rear tires to hold about 80 to 85 pounds of pressure, and the tires may be marked with the letters "LT" for "light truck" use. If the vehicle's tires don't meet the size and air-pressure requirements of the manufacturer, don't drive the vehicle until the problems are fixed.

Contact the Public Works office that leased the vehicle to you, the vehicle manufacturer, or a tire dealer if you have more questions concerning replacement tires for 15-passenger vans. Refer other questions about these vans to the Naval Safety Center's Traffic and Off-Duty Safety Division at (757) 444-3520, Ext. 7139 (DSN 564). 