

University of Oklahoma
Passenger Van Safety Policy 2017

In April of 2001 the NHTSA issued a cautionary warning for passenger vans and their propensity to rollover. According to the NHTSA study, "vans with ten or more occupants have three (3) times the rollover ratio than those with fewer than ten occupants." The report goes on to state "the decrease in stability under fully loaded conditions correlates to an increase in the rollover risk of approximately 40 percent."

The NHTSA made this information available because of the findings and several highly publicized rollover accidents involving 15 passenger vans loaded with college students (often driven by a fellow student rather than a professional driver). This report was also due to concerns related to 15 passenger van crashes involving transportation of college sports teams. All but one of these crashes involved rollover of a 15 passenger van. .

Multi-passenger vans (including 12-passenger vans) have a higher center of gravity. NHTSA analysis indicated that when 15-passenger vans are loaded, it causes the center of gravity to shift rearward and upward thus increasing the likelihood of rollover. The shift in the center of gravity also will increase the potential for loss of control in panic maneuvers. The fact is that the rollover risk increases as the number of occupants increase. With ten or more passengers, vans are three times more likely to rollover in single vehicle accidents, than when lightly loaded. By limiting the passenger capacity to 8 persons (including driver), the risk of rollover is reduced thus making it safer statistically. Another issue of concern are the inexperienced drivers who are not familiar with handling a larger vehicle, particularly in poor weather conditions, with a higher center of gravity. The risks are increased when these large capacity vans are driven by non-professional drivers.

Fully loaded 12-passenger vans can have the same propensity to become unstable and rollover, particularly in poor weather conditions.

The following pertains to University of Oklahoma multi-passenger vans:

- 1) The University will not own/operate or lease 15 passenger vans.
- 2) Passenger capacity will be limited to 9 people, including the driver. The NHSTA report noted that vans with more than 10 people had a 3 times higher rollover rate.
- 3) Existing vans with a 12 seat configuration can be used, but no more than nine (9) people, including the driver, can travel in the van.
- 4) New vans will have seating capacity for no more than ten (10) people.
- 5) Vehicle operators should assure that all passengers are wearing their seat belts. The NHTSA indicates that you can reduce your chance of being killed in a rollover by about 75% just by wearing a seat belt.
- 6) Posted speed limits should be observed by drivers. In most of the reported van accidents, speed was a contributing factor.
- 7) Drivers must be University of Oklahoma employees and using these vehicles in compliance with Oklahoma statutes and OU policies.
- 8) There will be no roof racks or trailer hitches on these vehicles. Luggage and gear must be stored (and secured) inside. Doors cannot be blocked by luggage and must be kept clear. These vehicles will not be used to tow trailers.
- 9) Do not exceed the gross vehicle weight (GVW) of the van.

