

# Safety Spotlight

## 15-Passenger Van Safety

Whether being used to drive volunteers to an event or employees in work carpools, 15-passenger vans are used by organizations on a frequent basis. However, these vehicles can pose a safety risk to inexperienced van drivers and other road users.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends drivers of 15-passenger vans take the following precautions when driving<sup>1</sup>:

### Occupancy and Cargo

- Never allow more than 15 people to ride in a 15-passenger van. When the van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle. All occupants need to wear seatbelts at all times. Seat belts should be regularly inspected and any missing, broken, or damaged belts and/or buckles should be replaced. An unrestrained 15-passenger van occupant involved in a single-car crash is approximately four times more likely to be killed than a restrained occupant. Cargo should be placed forward of the rear axle; avoid overloading the van or placing any loads on the roof. See owner's manual for maximum weight of passengers and cargo to determine towing capacity.

### Tires

- Tires, and any spares, should be inspected by having their treads, pressure, and inflation checked before each use. Using excessively worn or improperly inflated tires can lead to a loss of vehicle control and possibly a rollover. Avoid using old spares when replacing worn tires since all tires, even unused spares, weaken with age. It is important to remember that pressure for front and back tires may be different and that the pressure is likely higher than required for car tires. A placard on the driver's side door pillar and the owner's manual lists recommended tire size and pressure.

### Driver

- Fifteen-passenger vans should only be operated by trained, experienced drivers who operate these vehicles on a regular basis. The driver needs to possess a valid driver's license for their state of residence (a commercial driver's license is preferred). The driver should be well-rested and attentive to driving at all times. Drivers should remember that cell phone use while they are operating the van is illegal in many states. Drive time should be limited to 8 hours per 24-hour period.

### Speed

- Drivers should maintain a safe speed based on driving conditions and never exceed the posted speed limit. Drivers should always slow down if the roads are wet or icy; 15-passenger vans do not respond well to abrupt steering maneuvers and require additional braking time.

<sup>1</sup> 15-Passenger Vans. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 8 Feb. 2018, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/15-passenger-vans>.



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Seventy percent of 15-passenger van occupants

who were killed in crashes between 2007 and 2016 were unrestrained.<sup>1</sup>



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