

SAFETY ADVISORY 15-PASSENGER VANS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has reissued a cautionary warning to users of 15-passenger vans of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions.

The results of an analysis by NHTSA revealed that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that is similar to other light trucks and vans when carrying a few passengers. However, the risk of rollover increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases from fewer than five occupants to over ten passengers. In fact, 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) had a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded.

NHTSA's analysis revealed that loading the 15-passenger van causes the center of gravity to shift rearward and upward increasing the likelihood of rollover. The shift in the center of gravity will also increase the potential for loss of control in panic maneuvers.

Because of these risks, it is important that these vans be operated by experienced drivers. A person transporting 16 or more people for commercial purposes is required to have a Commercial Driver's License, which requires certain specialized knowledge and driving skills. Although the drivers of these vehicles are not required to possess a Commercial Driver's License, they should still understand and be familiar with the handling characteristics of their vans, especially when the van is fully loaded. *Drivers should be aware of the need to operate these vehicles conservatively, avoiding abrupt lane changes and sharp turns at high speeds*

NHTSA's analysis reinforces the value of seat belts. Eighty percent of those nationwide who died last year in single vehicle rollovers last year were not buckled up. Wearing seat belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash.

Based on the above information, Transportation Services at Clemson University instituted the requirement that drivers of 15-passenger vans must be at least 20 years of age, which the Department of Campus Recreation extended to the drivers of 12-passenger vans as well. Drivers must also complete the National Safety Council's Van Course #1 or #2. Course #1 is a self paced video course offered through the Motor Pool. Individuals may arrange a date and time to take the course by contacting Jim Castle at 656-2436. Course #2, which is conducted in a class format, includes a video presentation on safety issues related to van driving along with related class exercises and discussions.

Drivers are reminded to review the Regulations Governing Use of University Vehicles. Be aware of the mandate that occupants of University vehicles wear seatbelts at all times.