



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE.
Washington, DC 20590

December 2, 2010

Dear DMV Commissioner:

Recent fatal crashes in New York and Georgia involving 15 passenger vans resulted in the tragic loss of 10 lives and injuries to many other occupants. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) believe that State motor vehicle agencies can play a critical role in helping improve the safe operation of these vehicles, and we are writing to request your assistance.

Our safety data indicate that 9, 12, and 15-passenger vans are often inadequately maintained, and the tires are especially vulnerable to deterioration as they age. Because these vehicles have unique handling characteristics, they display particular sensitivity to rollovers, particularly when they are fully loaded. In both recent crashes the vans involved rolled over. In one case the vehicle was equipped with the wrong type of tires, and in the other the tires were visibly deteriorated.

In response to the recent crashes, NHTSA and FMCSA have undertaken a comprehensive outreach strategy to van owners, who are frequently not the original owner. We are sending them a direct mail postcard alert. Insurance companies, churches, civic organizations, and our Regional and Division Offices and State Highway Safety Offices are also contacting local organizations that may own these vehicles. Numerous articles and alerts have also been posted to our web sites, as well as to web sites of other national organizations, including the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators. Our goal is to reach owners several times with the same message, to increase the likelihood that they will take action to avoid further tragedy.

NHTSA has also taken direct actions to improve the safety of 9, 12, and 15-passenger vans, including issuing a number of regulations to improve their crashworthiness. While these new standards will save many lives when fully implemented, there are several steps that can be taken now to increase the safety of these vehicles.

First, we request that you send a letter (sample letter from New York is enclosed) and the NHTSA Consumer Advisory (see enclosure) to every registered owner of a 9, 12 and 15-passenger van in your State. This letter explains, in non-technical language, what owners of these vans should do to enhance their safety and stability.



Second, at the time of licensing or registering these vehicles, we ask that you alert owners of potential safety issues by providing them with the NHTSA Consumer Advisory.

Third, if your State requires periodic motor vehicle inspections, we ask that you alert your inspectors to the particular safety hazards of vans, and provide them with the enclosed inspection tip sheet. This tip sheet highlights key items that should be included as part of any required vehicle inspection for 9, 12 and 15-passenger vans. We ask that you consider adding these items to any existing requirements that you may have for these types of vehicles. This way the inspectors can take a proactive role in helping alleviate a potential tragedy.

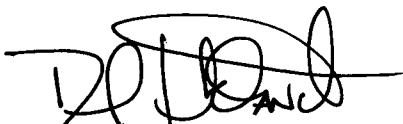
In addition, we would like to take this opportunity to remind all Commissioners that pre-primary, elementary, and secondary schools should not use 12 or 15-passenger vans for transporting students because they do not provide the same level of safety as school buses meeting NHTSA's safety standards. Furthermore, Federal law prohibits the sale or lease of a new 12 or 15-passenger van if it will be used to transport students.

Finally, anyone operating a passenger van that seats nine or more people for commercial purposes may be required to register with FMCSA and comply with safety regulations. To register and for more information about these requirements, go to www.fmcsa.gov.

As leaders in highway safety, we need to ensure that the vehicles being used to transport our families, friends, and neighbors are maintained and operated safely. State DMVs can play a key role in enhancing van safety: by taking the steps outlined in this letter, you can help improve the safe operation of vans and reduce the likelihood of crashes. Thank you very much for your help in taking these life-saving actions.

If you have any comments or concerns about the contents of this letter, please contact Ms. Marilena Amoni, Associate Administrator for National Center for Statistics and Analysis, at (202) 366-4290.

Sincerely yours,



David L. Strickland
Administrator



Anne S. Ferro
Administrator



Enclosures



**STATE OF NEW YORK
GOVERNOR'S TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES**

DAVID A. PATERSON
Governor

Dear Registrant:

A recent tragic fatal crash on the New York State Thruway involved a passenger vehicle similar to one that is registered in your name. We are advising you of safety risks regarding 9-, 12-, and 15-passenger vans so you can take critical precautions to ensure the safety of all those who ride in your vehicle.

Safe operation of 9-, 12-, and 15-passenger vans - such as the vehicle you own - requires precautions above and beyond those that you may be accustomed to as a driver of another passenger car. Specifically, these vans require heightened care in the choice and maintenance of tires, diligent attention to the use of seat belts and child safety seats by all occupants, and driver attention to the handling characteristics of the vehicle.

Because of their size and weight, especially when loaded with passengers, these vans place extreme demands on tires and suspension components. In the event of a tire failure, the driver of a 9-, 12-, or 15-passenger van may not be able to control the vehicle and a rollover can result. It is critical that tires are of the correct load rating and that they be in good condition and inflated to the proper air pressure. Tires that are of the wrong size or load rating, or are worn, underinflated, or deteriorated have been linked to a number of serious crashes. NHTSA recommends that all tires, including the spare, should be checked for the date of manufacture. Even if tires appear serviceable because they have not reached the legal wear limit, tires do degrade over time. Tire manufacturers recommend that consumers not use tires older than 10 years old.

We strongly advise you to have your vehicle carefully checked over by a qualified service center to verify that you are using the appropriate type of tires, and that the tires and suspension system of your vehicle are in safe condition. This is critical for the safety of everyone who rides in your vehicle.

Equally important for the safety of all those who travel in your van is the use of seat belts and child safety seats. The use of seat belts and child safety seats is important in any vehicle - but especially so in 9-, 12-, and 15-passenger vans. Seat belts and child safety seats provide critical protection from crash injuries in rollover crashes - and rollover crashes are a particular risk in large vans.

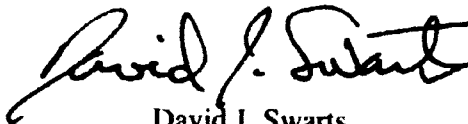
Not only is using seat belts a smart idea, it's the law in New York and nearly everywhere else. New York's occupant restraint law requires the driver and each passenger in the front seat to wear a seat belt, with one person per belt. Every passenger under age 16, regardless of where they are seated, must wear an appropriate safety restraint.

Finally, please ensure that drivers of your van are fully acquainted with the special precautions that need to be taken in its safe operation. Large vans respond to steering and braking differently than passenger cars, especially in windy conditions and when loaded with passengers and luggage or gear. A fully trained, experienced, and properly licensed driver is essential for controlling the van in unexpected driving situations.

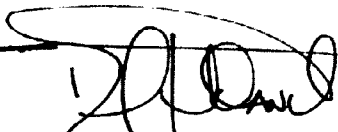
Your safety – and that of the passengers in your vehicle – is our highest concern. Please take the time to have your vehicle checked over for safety, make sure that everyone is buckled up and ensure that your driver is fully trained, experienced and is properly licensed.

Tips on the safe operation of 9-, 12-, and 15-passenger vans, can be found on NHTSA's SaferCar website at (<http://www.safercar.gov/Vehicle+Shoppers/Resources/15-Passenger+Van+Safety>). To obtain additional traffic safety information, please visit our web pages at www.safeny.com, www.nhtsa.dot.gov or www.fmcsa.dot.gov.

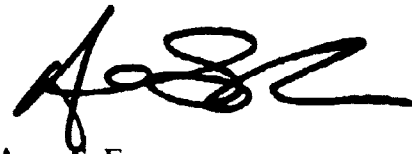
Sincerely,



David J. Swarts
DMV Commissioner



David L. Strickland
Administrator



Anne S. Ferro
Administrator





U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590
www.dot.gov/briefing-room.html

October 14, 2010
Contact: Karen Aldana
Tel: 202-366-9550

Consumer Advisory: NHTSA Reissues 15-Passenger Van Safety Caution

As the fall and winter driving seasons get under way, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is urging users of 15-passenger vans to take specific steps to keep occupants safe. Two recent fatal crashes, in New York and Georgia, involving 15-passenger vans that rolled over and resulted in 10 deaths give urgency to this reminder.

The agency warns that tire maintenance is paramount to preventing tragedies, such as these recent rollover crashes, from occurring. Users of 15-passenger vans need to make sure the vehicles have appropriately-sized tires that are properly inflated before every trip. The agency also points out that tires degrade over time. For this reason, NHTSA recommends that spare tires not be used as replacements for worn tires. In fact, many tire manufacturers recommend that tires older than 10 years not be used at all.

NHTSA said that it is directing this advisory to church groups, other non-profit organizations and colleges that may be keeping older 15-passenger vans in service longer than usual because of tight transportation budgets. Pre-primary, primary and secondary schools should not use 15-passenger vans for transporting school children, as they do not provide the same level of safety as school buses. It is also against federal law for schools to buy new 15-passenger vans for school transportation purposes.

Here are some safety tips for anyone planning a trip in 15-passenger vans:

- If you are an owner, make sure the vehicle is properly maintained.
- Owners should make sure drivers are fully trained and experienced in operating a 15-passenger van and are properly licensed.
- 15-passenger vans are very sensitive to loading and should not be overloaded under any circumstances. Agency research shows overloading not only increases rollover risk but makes the vehicle more unstable in any handling maneuvers.
- Owners should make sure that properly sized tires are being used on their vehicles.
- Before every trip, drivers should check the tires for proper inflation, and make sure there are no signs of wear. Correct tire size and inflation pressure information can be found in the owner's manual.
- If you are a passenger, make sure you buckle up for every trip.

Additional information on 15-passenger van safety can be found on www.safercar.gov

Additional Inspection Items Recommended for 15 Passenger Vans

- Tires: All tires, including the spare, should be checked to ensure that they are the appropriate size for the vehicle, are inflated to the proper pressure, have sufficient tread depth, and are in good condition.
 - Appropriate for the vehicle
 - Typical vans require LT load range E tires
 - Correct size information will be in the owner's manual and on the vehicle placard located on the driver side B-pillar or the glove compartment door
 - Inflation Pressure
 - Should be set to the vehicle manufacturer's recommended pressure
 - Correct inflation pressure will be in the owner's manual and on the vehicle placard located on the driver side B-pillar or the glove compartment door
 - Note: The front tires and the rear tires have different recommended inflation pressures
 - Tread Depth
 - Tread depth should be at least the legal tread depth
 - Tire Condition
 - Bulges, exposed tire cords, and cracks are indicators that a tire is beyond its useful life or dry rotten.
 - Valve stems should not have cracks or leak
 - Old Tires
 - The build date (week/yr) is molded into the inner sidewall of the tire
 - Some tire manufacturers recommend that tires over 10 years old be replaced
 - Replace the tire if the build date is not legible or visible
- Suspension System: Check for broken leaf springs, shocks, and shock absorbers
- Seat belts and air bag Condition:
 - All occupant protection systems that were originally provided must be available and fully functional. Belts should latch properly and the red air bag lamp should not illuminate after the vehicle is started