15 Passenger Van Safety Policy

Introduction

The purpose of the Skidmore College Policy on 15 Passengers Vans is to define basic guidelines and responsibilities for driving a College-owned, leased or rented 15 Passenger Van.

Skidmore College wishes to ensure that any individual driving a 15 Passenger Van possesses the ability to drive safely and assume responsibility for their passengers and vehicle.

Scope

This policy shall apply to all College personnel (including faculty, staff, and student).

Background

On April 11, 2001, The Chronicle of Higher Education reported “a federal agency was cautioning colleges...against carrying large groups of passengers in midsize vans.” The Federal Agency is the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Concerning 15 Passenger Vans, they issued a “Research Note” and “Consumer Advisory” with a “cautionary warning” that 15 Passenger Vans are more likely to rollover.

Vans are usually informally classified as minivans, cargo vans, and full-size vans. A 15 Passenger Van is essentially a cargo van fitted with windows, as well as additional seating to raise the capacity to 13 passengers in the rear seats, one in the front passenger seat and one driver. Drivers of vans larger than 15 Passenger, are required by Federal and State laws to carry a “commercial driver’s license” (CDL), with “school bus” endorsement, but presently, drivers of 15 Passenger Vans need only a valid driver’s license.

In response to the NHTSA findings, colleges are implementing a wide range of changes including the following:
- banning the vans (and hiring buses as substitutes)
  e.g. The University of Indiana has ordered all 12 and 15 Passenger Vans parked and eliminated from the fleet. That size of van may be used for cargo only if it can seat no more than six people.1
- splitting large groups, which were to ride in one van, into smaller groups across a number of vans
- removing the last seat in the vans
- phasing out larger vans
- restricting the distance of travel (range)

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1 Stephens, Larry, Vans, Director of Risk Management, Indiana University, URMIA Report, March-April 2001, p.9
• restricting driving to coaches and faculty members
• requiring driving or van safety training
• requiring professional drivers
• contracting out bus services
• prohibiting travel in vans by minors

The downside to the proposed changes is increased costs for transportation and driver training. Restricting the number of passengers by rule or by reconfiguring the seats can increase the possibility of flying cargo as cargo is substituted for people. The reduction also places more vehicles on the road, which may lead to an increased likelihood of an accident. It is not clear if any of these proposed changes would lead to increased safety.  

At the same time, it has noted that van rollovers has declined since the Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrator’s member institutions began implementing van driver training programs, motor vehicle record reviews, and checks for valid driver’s licenses.

Components of the Skidmore College Van Driver Safety Program

1. All van drivers must possess a current valid US Driver’s License and have completed a “Driver Authorization Application”, which has been accepted in accordance with the Motor Vehicle Policy.

2. Drivers of College owned 15 Passenger Vans shall be employees of the Transportation Department who possess a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) with a Passenger (P) Endorsement.

3. Drivers of College leased or rented 15 Passenger Vans must be approved College personnel and be at least 18 years of age (unless otherwise specified by the Rental Agency).

4. Drivers must complete a mandatory 15 Passenger Van Safety Training program that includes a video (covering: van characteristics, pre-trip inspection, safety belts, cushion of safety, scanning, blink spots and backing), response book and on-line testing.

5. Each department shall appoint a Representative to review the list of approved drivers and ensure compliance with the Motor Vehicle Policy and 15 Passenger Van Training requirements. The criteria for driver approval includes:
   • Possess a current valid US Driver’s License
   • Have completed a “Driver Authorization Application and been accepted in accordance with the Motor Vehicle Policy
   • Complete the 15 Passenger Van Safety Training
   • Sign the 15 Passenger Van Safety Acknowledgement Form (Attached)

6. Daily inspection shall be carried out and documented on all 15 Passenger Vans prior to operation, and include:
   • Tire pressure check and adjustment
   • Fluid leaks (e.g., gas odor, fluid under vehicle)

2Umberger, Norm, PE, Van Safety-Another Perspective, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, URMIA Report, p.6.
3Deger, Larry, 12 and 15 Passenger Vans, EIIA, URMIA Report, p.3.
Registration, insurance card, and accident report kit
All emergency and safety equipment including:
   i. Wipers
   ii. Lights
   iii. Horn
   iv. Windshield solvent
   v. Flashers
   vi. Mirrors and reflectors
   vii. Parking Brake
   viii. First Aid kit and fire extinguisher
   ix. Emergency Reflector Triangles

All necessary repairs should be performed before the van is used.

7. In College owned 15 Passenger Vans, the College fleet mechanic(s) will review the condition of the brakes and tires and the vehicle's suspension system every 3000 miles (to coincide with oil changes), as part of a documented vehicle maintenance program.

8. Skidmore College Departments requesting 15 Passenger Van driving services by the College Transportation Department should recognize that trips that are limited to a 100-Air Mile radius from Saratoga Springs.

9. Departmental trips involving 400 or more one-way miles should submit trip itineraries prior to the trip, to be reviewed by the Department Representative. Review will include route, and distance/time relationship. A minimum of one qualified driver per 400 miles of driving must be identified, with a two-driver minimum for any trip of 400 miles or more. Layovers are required in the event of adverse weather and unsafe road conditions.

10. On long trips, the driver will periodically take a rest break, allowing time to walk around the vehicle and visually inspect the vehicle, including tires and lights. A fifteen minute break is suggested after each two hours of driving, offering a moment to perform these checks.

11. For long trips, a navigator should be assigned to assist each driver, and should stay awake while on duty. Approved drivers shall be rotated to reduce fatigue.

12. The College reserves the right to cancel a trip based upon:
   • A schedule that does not allow adequate rest for the driver
   • Bad weather

13. All van drivers and passengers shall be required to wear their seat belt while traveling in the van.

14. Cell phone use will comply with present New York State Law.

15. Drivers shall obey all speed limits and all traffic laws.

16. Vans shall be properly loaded. There should be no more than 10 adult passengers. Manufacturer’s instructions should be reviewed prior to trips by referring to the vehicle safety manual.
17. No equipment or gear will be placed on the roof or roof rack of the 15 Passenger
Van because of the possibility that the center of gravity will be raised and
increase the likelihood of a rollover.

18. No alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs shall be carried into the vehicles.

19. Use of tobacco products (smoking, snuff, chewing tobacco) is prohibited in the
vehicles.

20. Do not give rides to strangers or hitchhikers.

21. Drivers will ensure that all interior and exterior lights are turned off and all doors
and windows are locked when the van is parked, and that the vehicle is shut off
while refueling.

22. Fines resulting from traffic or parking violations will be the obligation of the driver.
SKIDMORE COLLEGE
15 PASSENGER VAN SAFETY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

College personnel who may, for any reason, need to drive a College owned, rented or leased vehicle for the purpose of transporting 10-15 passengers must complete the 15 Passenger Van Safety Training program and initial/sign this form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgment of the possible risk associated with operating a 15 Passenger Van</th>
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1. 15 Passenger Vans have a rollover risk similar to other light trucks and vans.

2. The risk of rollover increases dramatically as the number of occupants is increased from fewer than five to more than ten. Vans should be loaded according to manufacturer’s recommendations.

3. The weight of the van, particularly when fully occupied, causes the center of gravity to shift rearward and upward causing the likelihood of rollover.

4. The shift in the center of gravity will also increase the potential for loss of control in panic maneuvers.

5. The weight of the van when fully occupied requires additional stopping distance.

6. The width of the van allows for less lane room.

7. The length of the van increases distance needed for making turns, changing lanes, backing.

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I have read and understood the possible risk involved while operating a 15 Passenger Van.

_______ (Initials)

I am aware the handling characteristics of a 15 Passenger Van may change dramatically, especially when fully loaded. Extra caution is required when operating this vehicle.

_______ (Initials)

The wearing of seatbelts by the operator and passengers are mandatory at all times.

_______ (Initials)

I have completed the required GuideOne’s, Coaching The Van Driver II (15 Passenger Van Training) Video, Response Book & ON-Line Training Session.

_______ (Initials)

Operator’s Name: ________________________________ Department: ____________________________

Operator’s Signature: _____________________________ Date: __________________