

LAMAR UNIVERSITY
RISK MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT
15 PASSENGER VAN POLICY

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Operating Policy/Procedure (OP) is to help minimize the risks of liability connected with travel by university faculty, staff, and students.

GOAL: This policy is designed to prevent accidents and minimize the risk of personal injury and property damage

DISCUSSION: The safety of Lamar University employees, students and visitors is a prime concern in the use of 15-passenger vans. The potential for accidents and injuries associated with the use of 15 passenger vans is well documented. A major problem is that these vans have a high center of gravity. That center shifts even higher and rearward as the rearmost seats are occupied. The rearward shift increases its likelihood of overturning. The combination of lateral slide of the rear tires fishtailing and the “top-heavy” design compound the risk of rollover. There are dangerous stability problems, not noticeable to average drivers, and is all too apparent in emergency steering situations. The more heavily loaded the van, the greater the gravity shift and the more likely it is to overturn. In addition, because these vans are substantially longer and wider than cars, they require more space for changing lanes and more time for braking. Because most 15-passenger vans have single rather than dual rear wheels, they do not have enough rear traction when fully loaded to safely perform emergency steering maneuvers. A sharp turn in an emergency could cause rear tire slide, or fishtailing.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has found that rollover crash is greatly increased when 10 or more people ride in a 15-passenger van. They issued a warning advisory in April 2001 warning of their propensity to rollover. NHTSA made this information available because of findings and several rollover accidents involving 15-passenger vans loaded with college students and crashes involving transportation of college sports teams.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE:

PHASE OUT

A 15-Passenger Van Phase Out is effective with the adoption of this policy, and the purchase, lease or rental of 15-passenger vans is prohibited.

RESPONSIBILITY

The safe operation of 15-passenger vans is the joint responsibility of the University, its officials, operators and passengers. Each is accountable for specific aspects of the program.

Existing 15-passenger vans owned by the University and currently in use will be required to have the following adjustments that are **in addition to regular safety practices**:

- Remove the rear seat to make sure that passengers sit in front of the rear axle. Load occupants from the front.
- Carry no more than nine occupants.
- Keep the rear area as free of luggage or equipment as possible to prevent overloading. Carry nothing on the roof.
- Prohibit the towing of trailers with 15-passenger vans on off-campus trips

The following regular safety practices will be rigorously followed.

- Require occupants to wear seat belts at all times. Create a written policy to this effect, and make drivers responsible for enforcing it.
- Inspect tires monthly to make sure they are properly inflated and that the tread is not worn down. Mis-inflated tires increase the likelihood of a rollover.
- Minimize the use of vans between midnight and 6 a.m. The combination of driver fatigue and poor visibility after dark can be dangerous, even deadly.
- Prohibit any driver from operating the vans for more than 8 hours in any 24-hour period. Have more than one qualified driver for trips of more than 6 hours, and have drivers rotate shifts every 2 hours.
- Require drivers to avoid using cell phones as such use could prevent or distract the driver from hearing traffic-warning devices.
- Evaluate weather conditions and curtail travel when conditions are hazardous. This includes but is not limited to fog, heavy rain, snow, ice, high winds, etc.

Passenger Responsibility

All passengers may only be seated in seats equipped with seat belts and must wear seat belts at all times while traveling.

References: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

Rules and Regulations Governing the Use, Operation and Maintenance of State-Owned Fleet Vehicles.