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RISK ADVISORY

TO: **ALL STATE AGENCIES**

FROM: **Division of Risk Management**

SUBJECT: **15-PASSENGER VANS**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued a "cautionary warning" to users of 15-passenger vans because of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions. The NHTSA analysis of the 15-passenger van can be found at: *http://nhtsa.dot.gov/people/ncsa/reports.html#2001* with the full text found at: *http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/ncsa/pdf/15vanRollNote.pdf.*

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. As a result the use of the 15-passenger van by colleges and universities has been questioned.

The use of 15-passenger vans is not prohibited for colleges and universities, and there are no state laws governing their use for transporting college students. Nevertheless, there are numerous position papers that outline why 15-passenger vans are not as safe as "school buses" and recommend against their use in transporting students. The 15-passenger vans are not required to nor do they provide the higher level of protection for passengers that are required of buses.

While there are currently no laws prohibiting the use of the 15-passenger van by colleges and universities, there are best safety practices for their operation and use. It is these best practices that are recommended by the Division of Risk Management. Each college, university or agency using the 15-passenger van should develop their own best policies and practices meeting individual needs using these best practices as a starting point.

Further information may be obtained from the Division of Risk Management.

15-PASSENGER VANS
"BEST SAFETY PRACTICES"

1. **Allow only trained and certified drivers to operate the vehicles.**

   a. Minimum age of driver should be 21.
   b. Driver should have a minimum of two years driving experience.
   c. A violation check should reveal no more than one moving violation within the last 12 months.
   d. No violations or traffic stops related to alcohol.
   e. Successful completion of a Defensive Driver training program within the past two years.
   f. A road test with a designated driver coordinator/trainer within the last 12 months.
   g. Possess a valid driver's license appropriate for the vehicle being driven.
   h. An inexperienced driver should be given practice operating the van under the supervision of a trained driver prior to being allowed use of the van.

2. **Drivers should be responsible for inspecting the vehicle prior to leaving the parking site.**

   a. Any defects should be noted and corrected prior to departure.
   b. All equipment and luggage carried should be secured in a safe manner.
   c. Weather conditions should be evaluated and travel should be curtailed when conditions are hazardous. (This includes but not limited to fog, heavy rain, snow, ice, high winds, etc.)
   a. Trailers should be prohibited.
   b. Roof mounted loads should be prohibited.

3. **There should be a suitable number of drivers for the trip, based on the distance being driven.**

   a. There should be one driver for every 400 miles being driven.
   b. No more than eight hours of continuous driving should be allowed.
   c. A driver must rest at least a half-hour for every two consecutive hours of driving.
   d. No driver should drive more than four hours a day.
   e. Drivers should not drive between 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. without special permission.
   f. Drivers should not use a cell-phone while driving.

4. **Passengers should adhere to the following rules:**

   c. All passengers should wear seat belts at all times while traveling.
   d. Passengers should use only seats equipped with seat belts.
   e. No alcohol or drugs should be consumed or allowed in vehicles.
   f. Vehicles should not be overloaded and tires should be properly inflated based on the load carried.

5. Other safety considerations.

a. Vehicle headlights should be on when driving.
b. Drivers should not drive a vehicle that is not operating properly.
c. Drivers must obey all traffic regulations, including posted speed limits.
g. Vehicles should be limited to no more than **10** passengers (despite being 15-passenger vans, the maximum number of passengers should be 10).
h. A cell phone, charged battery and a battery charger should be provided for each vehicle/trip.
i. Students should **not** operate 15-passenger vans or trucks.