

15-Passenger Van Safety & Risk Mitigation Tips (September 2003 Update)

If you've been following the news for the past few years, you've probably noticed many reports about 15-passenger van rollover accidents. Reputable engineering and safety reports are confirming that 15-passenger vans have a tendency to rollover under certain driving and loading conditions especially when being driven by inexperienced drivers. In fact, the University of Alaska has experienced several rollover accidents that have injured passengers. Many other universities have experienced more catastrophic accidents that have involved very serious injuries and fatalities. School districts across the country have been prohibited by law from using 15-passenger vans to transport K-12 students. UAF has actually pulled all their 15-passenger vans from their fleet. Many rental agencies are no longer renting 15-passenger vans and when they do, they will not provide insurance coverage options because of the proven higher risk exposure. At this time there are only two rental agencies in the Anchorage area renting 15-passenger vans and they may discontinue that practice in the very near future. With these things in mind, UA and UAA began phasing out and controlling the use of 15-passenger vans last year.

As funding permits, UAA will be replacing the 15-passenger vans with smaller 7-passenger minivans and 12-passenger vans. The Operations Department (786-6959) has several vans available for UAA use. The in-house rental fee for these vans is lower than the average van rental cost. As the in-house demand for passenger vans increases and as budget becomes available, the Operations Department intends to increase the mini-van (7 passenger) and 12-passenger van fleet. Keep in mind that the word "passenger" includes the driver. These are actually 7-person and 12-person vans.

As of the Fall 03 semester, the renting of 15-passenger vans from external agencies is strictly prohibited. The existing modified vans owned, operated, and maintained by UAA can continue to be used through July 30, 2004. However, their use must be permitted by EHS (786-1351) or Operations (786-6959) for each event or activity and must be operated in accordance with the guidelines listed below. There are no blanket or continuous permits. For permits involving the use of modified 15-passenger vans, contact Trig Trigiano at trig@uaa.alaska.edu or John Kincaid at anjek@uaa.alaska.edu and provide the details of your planned activity (dates & times, locations, durations, etc.). After July 30, 2004, the modified vans are no longer authorized for passenger use at UAA and should be traded-out for smaller vans or converted to cargo vans. Twelve passenger vans (one driver and 11 passengers) are available for sale by local vendors as of September 2003 and 7-passenger minivans have been available for years.

While cargo vans aren't referenced in this document, it's a good idea to apply as much of this advice to cargo van use as possible. With all these things in mind, we ask that all UAA departments abide by the following set of rules when using 15-passenger vans and other vehicles as applicable.

1. *(15-Passenger vans)* Remove the rear bench seat and prohibit storage or cargo in the rear area of vans and load vans from front to rear. Another option is to disable the lock mechanism on the rear cargo door to prevent use of the rear space and remove the rear bench seat. If you have a need for extra cargo space, arrange with Operations Department (786-6959) or your rental agency to get an extra vehicle or pickup truck.
2. *(All passenger vans)* Use experienced drivers (seven years if possible, CDL preferred) that meet UAA's safe driver criteria (<http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ehsrms/TransportationSafetyPro10.pdf>) and have recently had defensive driving instruction specific to passenger vans. Contact the Operations Department about enrolling in their free course at 786-6959.
3. *(All passenger vans)* Prohibit the use of roof rack storage systems on larger passenger vans and remove all towing hitches (no towing). Use of low profile ski-racks is authorized.

4. (15-passenger vans) Avoid speeds greater than 35mph, never exceed 45mph and restrict van use to your local area. Avoid high-speed highway driving. 12 and 7 passenger vans should not exceed 55mph.
5. *(All passenger vans)* Do not use vans during extreme conditions (ice, snow, wind, fog and rain).
6. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Require that seatbelts be worn when vans and other vehicles are in motion. This is a State of Alaska law and the university will not pay for citations issued against drivers and passengers who are not properly using their seatbelts. The current fine for this infraction in Anchorage is \$50 per unbuckled adult. The citations are issued to the individual unbuckled adults. Unbuckled minors incur a \$50 fine to the driver. Other state and local authorities may apply greater or lesser fines. All citations carry a 2-point penalty against the offender's driver's license whether they are the driver or a passenger. Drivers must refuse to move their vehicles until all people are buckled-up. If a passenger refuses to buckle-up, the driver should contact his or her supervisor for instructions.
7. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Require drivers to take stretch breaks at least every two hours and never exceed eight driving hours per day per driver.
8. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles unless rated appropriately)* Never use vans or other non-rated vehicles in "off-road" capacities.
9. *(All vans)* Increase the standard following distance (1 van length per 10mpg) by adding an additional 4 van lengths when the van is traveling at speeds greater than 35mph (example: a van traveling at 40mph should maintain, under standard defensive driving criteria, a separation of 4 van lengths from vehicles in front. Under this suggestion, the separation distance would increase to 8 van lengths).
10. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Prohibit the drivers from using cell phones while vehicles are in motion. Pull over to a safe location to use cell phones or use a hands-free technology.
11. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Make use of supplemental or other insurance options found at: <http://www.alaska.edu/swrisk/download/stappl.pdf> for university supervised student field trips and activities.
12. *(All vehicles transporting any non-employees)* Use the UA standard release form found at <http://www.alaska.edu/swrisk/download/roac.pdf> as applicable.
13. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Avoid transporting minors (under the age of 18). If you have to transport minors, consult with UAA Risk Management Support (786-1351 or trig@uaa.alaska.edu) before working with minors.
14. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Drivers should avoid distractions such as excessive talking with passengers. In other words, drivers should not simultaneously be "tour guides" and drivers. Drivers should never wear earphones or headphones. However, listening to music or other entertainment at reasonable volumes over the vehicle's speaker system is fine.
15. *(All UAA owned or leased vehicles)* Require that drivers sign-off on these rules and insist on accountability from both supervisors and employees.