



# Regarding Fifteen-Passenger Van Safety

EDITION: January 6, 2025

- Driving is unfortunately one of the more dangerous activities we
- commonly participate in. The risks associated with fifteen-passenger vans, or any large passenger van continue to represent an increased safety concern for Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM).

The safety issues with these vans have been recognized for some time and sadly, the Seventh-day Adventist® Church has experienced tragic losses because of their use. Because of this, the North American Division (NAD) and ARM have strongly cautioned against the use of these types of vehicles, and the NAD has even prohibited fifteen-passenger van use for many years.

Today, government regulation and technological advancements have produced significant improvements to the safety of these vehicles. Because of the demonstrable improvement to safety, the NAD and ARM have updated their position regarding the use of newer passenger vans.

## Church Policy

ARM supports the updated North American Division (NAD) working policy S 60 31 Vehicle Insurance.

## ***Pre-2013 Fifteen-Passenger Van Use***

*In the interest of safety, denominational organizations shall not purchase, lease, rent or use pre-2013 fifteen-passenger vans or modified fifteen-passenger vans for sponsored activities under any circumstances. Alternatives to fifteen-passenger vans include: minivans and SUVs, mini-school buses, fifteen-passenger buses with dual rear wheels.*

## ***Vehicles with Ten or More Passengers***

*In the interest of safety, denominational organizations should exercise extra caution when using any passenger vehicle designed for ten (10) passengers or more. Organizations should be aware of the relevant jurisdictional requirements such as for Commercial Driving License (CDL) designation, seat belt laws, or prohibition for use to transport school children which may apply to them and should follow all legal and jurisdictional requirements.*



This means that fifteen-passenger vans from model year 2013 or newer are no longer prohibited by NAD working policy. Fifteen-passenger vans from model years prior to 2013 are still prohibited. There is additional focus on the risks associated with any large passenger van and the steps that can be taken to address those risks.

### Why are pre-2013 Fifteen-Passenger Vans Dangerous?

Fifteen-passenger vans were originally designed for transporting cargo, not passengers. Their design flaws make them particularly hazardous when used for transporting people. Key risk factors include:

- **Unbalanced Weight Distribution:** The design places more weight toward the rear tires, which reduces braking ability and makes the vehicle prone to oversteer.
- **High Rollover Risk:** Vans loaded with over 10 passengers raise the center of gravity, leading to instability in turns.

- **Fully Loaded Vans are Deadlier:** Approximately 50 percent of fatalities occur in vans at or near full capacity.
- **Tire Wear and Inflation Issues:** Uneven weight distribution often results in uneven tire wear. Under-inflated tires can lead to blowouts and loss of vehicle control.
- **Crosswind Instability:** These vans are particularly vulnerable to crosswinds, further increasing the risk of accidents.

### New Safety Technologies

The US federal government assisted in addressing some of the key concerns by implementing new safety standards.

- **2005 Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 138** requires tire pressure monitoring systems (TPMS) for light vehicles to help prevent tire failure.
- **2011 Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 126** requires electronic stability control (ESC) technology in passenger vehicles 10,000 pounds or less.

- Fifteen-passenger vans from model year 2013 or newer are no longer prohibited by NAD working policy.



# Safety Guidelines

## Compliance

Check if your jurisdiction has any applicable regulations such as requiring drivers to have a commercial drivers license (CDL) or prohibition of use for transporting school children that may apply to your ministry.

Also, ensure that your vehicle is properly ensured through your conference's commercial auto insurance policy to the required policy limits of the NAD.

## The Driver

Passenger vans should be driven by experienced, properly licensed drivers who drive these or similar vehicles regularly. Drivers need to understand the differences in size and weight that impact maneuverability and stopping distance, especially when fully loaded.

- **Attention:** The driver should be well-rested and focused on the task of driving. They should not be distracted by devices, conversation, or engaged in the supervision of passengers.
- **Speed:** Drivers should follow posted speed limits and know when to further control speeds due to weather conditions. Remember, this vehicle will maneuver and stop differently from smaller passenger vehicles.
- **Seatbelts:** Ensure all passengers wear seatbelts. Many of the deaths associated with fifteen-passenger van accidents could have been avoided if passengers were wearing seat belts.

## Dimensions

Passenger vans are usually longer and wider than the cars, SUVs, and vans that most people drive. These increased dimensions require more space to maneuver and further reliance on mirrors, back-up cameras, and other systems.

## Weight

Passenger vans can weigh more than the vehicles most people drive every day, especially when loaded up with cargo and passengers.

- **Occupancy:** Never allow more than the manufacturer's recommended number of passengers to ride in a passenger van. The NHTSA recommends you "fill the seats from front to back: when the van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.
- **Cargo:** Cargo should be placed forward of the rear axle; avoid overloading the van or placing any loads on the roof. See the vehicle owner's manual for maximum weight of passengers and cargo and to determine towing capability."

## Maintenance

Follow a systematic maintenance schedule with the passenger van and ensure this includes safety checks.

- **Spare Tires:** Because unused tires deteriorate with age; it is important to ensure spare tires are in good condition. The last four digits of the Tire Identification Number (TIN) are located on the sidewall of the tire and indicate the week and year the tire was manufactured. For example, 1025 would indicate March of 2025.
- **Tire Pressure:** The tires and tire pressure should be inspected before each use. Ensure that tires, including the spare tire, are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down. Worn tires or improperly inflated tires can lead to a loss of vehicle control and possibly a rollover. The driver's side door pillar or the owner's manual will have the recommended tire size and pressure. Tire pressure may be recommended at different levels for front and back tires.

## Safety Inspection

Don't forget to conduct a pre-trip vehicle inspection before using a passenger van. You can find a [pre/post-trip inspection](#) form at [Adventistrisk.org](http://Adventistrisk.org).



## Call-to-Action

Take immediate steps to address transportation risks in your ministry.

- 1. Discontinue Use:** Do not use pre-2013 fifteen-passenger vans for any purpose.
- 2. Remove From Fleet:** Remove all pre-2013 fifteen-passenger vans from your ministry's vehicle fleet.
- 3. Seek Safer Alternatives:** Consider leasing or purchasing safer alternatives that meet modern safety standards.
- 4. Ensure Compliance:** Check if your jurisdiction has any applicable regulations such as requiring driver to have a CDL or prohibiting use for transporting school children that may apply to your ministry.
- 5. Educate:** Ensure that your ministry volunteers understand the requirements and responsibilities around the use of passenger vehicles in ministry.

The NHTSA (<https://www.nhtsa.gov/vehicle-safety/15-passenger-vans#topic-safety-precautions>) also has helpful safety precautions when using fifteen-passenger vans posted on their website. These would be appropriate when using any passenger van.



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