



15-PASSENGER VANS: WHAT IS THE DANGER?

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15-Passenger Vans: What is the Danger?

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Have you heard that additional measures are being taken to remove 15-passenger vans from use within the North American Division (NAD)? For several years, Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) has encouraged church organizations to remove and discontinue operation of this van model. Recently, NAD Church Working Policy (available below) was updated to clarify that this is not a discretionary choice.

With this renewed focus on removing 15-passenger vans from use, there have been many questions about the safety improvements in the latest models. Are the new vans safe for use? Does the updated policy apply to them as well?

There may have been safety improvements in the newest vans including options such as stability control, tire pressure monitoring systems, full passenger side airbags, traction control, anti-lock brakes, rear view camera, and improved safety glass. However, these safety features *still* do not address the fundamental problems.

1. The 15-passenger vans are **not balanced**. The “walkway” to the rear seats goes along one side of the van. There will be less weight on the aisle side, and the weight of passengers will be on the other side of the van, so the vehicle bears its weight to one side. Unequal weight distribution causes uneven wear on the tires. Combine the imbalance with deferred maintenance (tires are rarely rotated or replaced as often as needed) and these vans are at greater risk of tire blowouts or rollovers.

2. The center of gravity for passengers is higher than for cargo (Fifteen-passenger models were designed to haul cargo, not people). The center of weight higher up in the van, than would otherwise be the case, puts an already imbalanced and possibly unevenly worn vehicle at greater risk of rollover.
3. Add to these issues the unknown of who is driving these vehicles. Driving a 15-passenger van is NOT the same as driving a car or regular passenger vehicle. Many states require the driver of a 15-passenger van to have the appropriate CDL license and experience with vehicles of this size/weight.

In many states, laws prohibit the use of 15-passenger vans by schools for bus services. These laws vary by state for private schools. If the vans are considered unsafe for use by public schools to transport children, why would we use them to carry our children or our members? We should apply the highest standard for those in our care.

Consider this issue from the perspective of our church structure as well. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the local church is not an isolated legal entity. It is the entire conference of churches that is on the line for their decisions. An accident with injuries and/or deaths exposes assets of the entire conference. The local conference is not the type of entity that can simply file for bankruptcy and rebuild under a different name.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America voted an action into the NAD Working Policy during the 2016 year-end meetings. **S 60 31 (GC S 60 30-3) Vehicle Insurance.**

Fifteen-Passenger Van Use — In the interest of safety, denominational organizations shall not purchase, lease, rent, or use 15-passenger vans or modified 15-passenger vans for sponsored activities under any circumstances. Alternatives to 15-passenger vans include: minivans and SUVs, mini-school buses, 15-passenger buses with dual rear wheels.

There are other elements to keep in mind, no matter what type of vehicle you choose to use.

- Be sure you only carry as many people as seat belts, and always wear your seat belts.
- Make informed choices regarding drivers. Review their record and experience level before they get behind the wheel.
- Conduct pre-trip inspections to be sure your vehicle is in good condition for the road.
- Conduct regular vehicle maintenance.

Remember, the actions of a local church that chooses to operate outside of the guidelines of the greater organization can have a profound effect on the entire conference of churches. We need to focus on saving lives and treating people with dignity and respect for life.

ARM asks for your support in removing all 15-passenger vans from use in your church.

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