

NIC Van Safety Training



When you are driving NIC students, faculty and staff to and from college field trips, games and events, you are carrying precious cargo.

The National Highway Traffic & Safety Administration reports that in a recent 12-year period, there were over 1500 fatal crashes involving 15-passenger vans.

North Idaho College has eliminated 15 passenger vans from its fleet and has replaced them with 12 passenger vans, but it is important to note that all vans have a high risk of rollover incidents and other safety concerns specific to vans.

As a driver of North Idaho college vehicles, we appreciate your service to the college and your commitment to safety, and it is our expectation that you will safeguard this precious cargo.

Van Safety Concerns



- Drivers operate vans infrequently
- Lack of formal training
- Seatbelt usage low
- Age vs. experience

Some safety concerns specific to vans:

- Drivers of passenger vans may operate them infrequently, and there is generally a lack of formal training.
- Research shows that seatbelt use among occupants of vans is very low compared to other types of vehicles, increasing the odds of fatalities from a rollover.
- When it comes to crashes, the age of the driver was less of a factor than the amount of experience they had.

Vans Don't Handle Like Cars



- Higher, longer, heavier
- Higher center of gravity
- Accelerate slower
- Longer stopping distance
- More blind spots

- Vans don't handle like cars. They are higher, longer and heavier than cars.
- The center of gravity on a passenger van is higher due to its size and shape. The center of gravity for cars is usually located at the bumper level of the vehicle. When filled to capacity, the center of gravity for a van could be as high as the steering wheel.
- Vans accelerate slower; this is particularly important to remember as you are merging into fast moving traffic, such as a freeway on-ramp.
- Vans have a longer stopping distance due to the increased weight, particularly when loaded with passengers and gear.
- Remember, you have decreased visibility with more blind spots. Turn your head to check your blind spots; you may need to lean forward slightly to get a full view of your side mirrors. If a vehicle is driving in your blind spot for too long, adjust your speed as necessary to keep the vehicle in sight.

Van Rollover Risk



High Rollover Risk:

- Higher center of gravity shifts with load
- Speeds over 50 MPH
- Over-correcting steering
- More susceptible to wind
- As # of passengers increase, so does risk
- NIC vans=12 passengers

- Rollover crashes for vans can be deadly, so it's important to understand contributing factors.
- As the van is loaded with passengers and equipment, the center of gravity continues to rise. This seriously compromises stability, especially when traveling at speeds over 50 MPH.
- Quick, unplanned maneuvers such as sudden turns, overcorrecting the steering, or striking a curb with the rear wheel can all contribute to a rollover.
- Driving too fast through curves can also cause a significant shift of weight, causing the van to lean in the opposite direction of the curve.
- Vans are more susceptible to wind gusts. This is especially dangerous if a blast of wind hits the side of the van. Also be cautious of the wind vacuum that is created by large trucks and buses. Keep both hands firmly on the steering wheel and reduce your speed to maintain control of your vehicle.
- NHTSA research found that the rollover risk of 15-passenger vans dramatically increased as the number of passengers increased.
 - 3x risk with 10 passengers
 - 5x risk when fully loaded
- There are no 15 passenger vans in NIC's fleet--only 12 passenger vans.
- If you are driving a rental van, you cannot exceed 12 passengers per NIC's Vehicle Use Guidelines. Remember, all vans have an increased risk of rollover.

Before You Leave...

- Visual inspection
- Know controls
- Tire pressure and tread wear
- Adjust mirrors and seat
- Test drive if unfamiliar



- Before you leave on your trip, do a visual inspection of your vehicle to locate the controls for lights, wipers, hazard flashers, hood latch, etc.
- Be sure to adjust your mirrors and seat. Keep in mind that you will rely on your mirrors much more in a van than in a car due to your blind spots.
- You may want to take a test drive to familiarize yourself with the handling of your vehicle before leaving on your trip.
- Every time you stop, be sure to walk around your vehicle for a quick visual inspection.
- If a tire looks low, check the pressure. A primary contributor of *any* vehicle rollover is loss of control caused by tire failure. Proper tire pressure is essential in maintaining the integrity of the tires. The proper air pressure level is found on the tire pressure sticker or vehicle data plate located on the doorjamb or glove box door. The driver's manual will also provide this information.

Loading Passenger Vans



- Fill front of van first
- Never exceed seatbelt capacity; 12 passengers maximum in any van.
- Center of gravity shifts
- No loads on roof
- No loose objects in van
- Don't load gear higher than top of back seat

- Passengers should fill the front seats first. If possible, keep passengers and cargo forward of the rear axle. If the van is loaded to capacity, remember that the center of gravity has shifted upward and toward the rear of the van and it will handle differently than when you are driving alone or with just a few people.
- Never exceed the number of seats and/or seatbelts. Per NIC Vehicle Use Guidelines, you should never have more than 12 people riding in any van.
- You should not have any loads on the roof and no loose objects within the van. Cargo nets can keep gear in the back of the van secure. Don't load gear higher than the top of the back seat.
- Here are some tips for loading or unloading passengers:
 - Be sure the van is parked out of traffic or the traveled lane.
 - Turn on hazard flashers when van is loading.
 - Park the van on a level surface and apply the emergency brake.
 - Never leave the driver's seat when the engine is running.
 - Be sure the passenger door has been checked and is securely closed.
 - Be sure all persons outside the van are clear of the van before pulling away.

Seatbelts Save Lives



- Shoulder & lap belts at all times
- Driver responsible!
- Verbal reminder “buckle up”
- Quick check before moving the van.

- 80% of fatalities in 15 passenger van accidents were not wearing seatbelts.
- Be sure all passengers use shoulder and lap belts at all times. The driver is responsible for passenger seatbelt compliance.
- A verbal reminder to passenger to buckle up should be followed by a quick check before moving the van.
- Seatbelts can only save lives when they are used.
- It's the law!

Defensive Driving



- Be alert & focused
- No cell phone use
- Don't tailgate
- Greater stopping distance
- 3-4 second following distance minimum.
- Don't cut corners sharply
- Maintain safe speed & safety cushion
- Watch for people and animals

Driving defensively and courteously pays off!

- Be alert and stay focused on your task.
- Never use a cell phone or allow yourself to become distracted while driving.
- Don't tailgate. Vans have a greater stopping distance due to the weight of passengers and gear.
- A 3-4 second following distance between you and the vehicle in front of you is a recommended minimum in a van. You can check your following distance by noting when the vehicle in front of you has reached a stationary object such as a mile marker, and then counting the time it takes for your vehicle to reach that same stationary object. Remember, 3-4 seconds is the minimum following distance; increase your following distance for adverse weather or road conditions.
- Drive at a safe speed for the weather and road conditions. Remember, posted speeds are for cars and excellent conditions. Reducing your speed is a simple but important safety practice when driving.
- Be mindful of your cushion of safety. In addition to allowing space for the vehicle in front of you, don't continuously ride alongside other vehicles. You want an "out" so you can change lanes smoothly in case you encounter an unexpected hazard or debris in the roadway.

Backing Precautions



- Back slowly, use mirrors
- Use spotter when possible
- Don't lose sight of spotter
- Be clear on hand signals
- Plan ahead; don't back into traffic
- Back toward driver's side
- Be sure van is in the parking space

- Back-up slowly and be sure to use your mirrors.
- Use a spotter when possible. Be clear on the hand signals you will use. Roll down your window. Be sure you can see the spotter in your mirror at all times; if you lose sight of the spotter, STOP!
- Plan ahead when possible to avoid backing into traffic.
- If you have to make a sharp turn while backing, you will have a blind side. You'll have more visibility if you back towards the driver's side. Again, your spotter will be helpful because they can see both sides of the van.
- Be sure your van is in the parking space before you lock it and leave.

If Wheels Go Off Roadway



- Don't panic
- Don't brake suddenly
- Don't over-correct
- Slow down gradually
- Ease back onto road when safe

The National Highway Traffic & Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that in 90% of rollover vehicle crashes, the driver lost control and ran off the road.

There are three major situations that lead to van rollover:

- The van goes off a rural road; if this occurs, the van is likely to overturn when it strikes a ditch or embankment or runs into soft soil.
- The driver is fatigued or driving too fast for conditions and loses control of the vehicle. A slide sideways off the road and into a grassy or dirt median generally causes the van tires to dig into the dirt and overturn.
- The driver “overcorrects” the steering as a panic reaction to an emergency or to a wheel dropping off the pavement. Drivers are especially susceptible at freeway speeds of losing control, resulting in the van sliding sideways and rolling over.

If your wheels go off the roadway, don't panic and don't brake suddenly; slow down gradually and ease back onto the roadway when it is safe.

When Not to Drive



STOP
REVIVE
SURVIVE

Ability to drive impaired by:

- Fatigue, illness or injury
- Drowsy or in need of rest
- Alcohol
- Drug Use, including prescription drugs that warn of drowsiness or “Do not operate machinery”

Impaired driving may result in a vehicle accident. Follow these tips for preventing impairment:

- Get adequate rest.
- Don't drive under the influence.
 - No alcohol or illegal drug use
 - Some prescription and over-the-counter drugs may warn of drowsiness. “Do not operate machinery” on the label means no driving!
- Use authorized and trained relief drivers. Limit the time each driver spends behind the wheel by taking turns for prescribed shifts.

On Long Trips



- Check weather and road conditions
- Avoid fatigue
- Take breaks
- Designate relief driver before you go
- Daytime driving

- Be sure to check weather and road conditions.
- Driving in adverse conditions requires close attention to what's happening all around and even the next several cars ahead. Reducing speed is a simple but important safety practice when driving in rain, snow, ice, fog or other severe weather.
- Take breaks often, especially if you begin to feel tired or fatigued.
- Only share the driving with experienced drivers.
- It is the driver's responsibility to be sure your relief driver has a valid drivers license in their possession and has completed NIC's Vehicle Use Guidelines and van safety training.
- If using a rental van, you must also comply with all rental company terms of operation. Of note, the rental company may have a different minimum age for drivers than NIC's guidelines; you must comply with the rental company directives if they exceed NIC's age requirement.
- Drive during the daytime if possible. The increased visibility will lessen the chances of hitting an animal or other obstacle in the roadway. If you must drive after dark, have someone stay awake in the front seat with you to help keep you alert.

Mandatory Driver Qualifications for Vans

- 25 years of age
- Possess a current, valid driver's license
- Comply with all laws
- Review and submit:
 - NIC's Vehicle Use Guidelines
 - NIC's Van safety training and quiz
- Drive in a safe and courteous manner.

- You must possess a current valid driver's license.
- You must comply with all state laws, ordinances and regulations pertaining to the state in which the driver is operating the vehicle.
- Whether you are driving an NIC fleet van or a rental van, you must read and acknowledge NIC's Vehicle Use Guidelines.
- You must complete this van safety video and the quiz that follows it.