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News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media Calls: Rae Tyson (202) 366-9550

Consumer Calls: Auto Safety Hotline 1-888-327-4236

CONSUMER ADVISORY

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is issuing a cautionary warning to users of 15-passenger vans because of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions.

The results of a recent analysis by NHTSA revealed that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that is similar to other light trucks and vans when carrying a few passengers. However, the risk of rollover increases dramatically as the number of occupant's increases from fewer than five occupants to over ten passengers.

In fact, 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) had a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded.

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.

Because of these risks, it is important that these vans be operated by experienced drivers. A person transporting 16 or more people for commercial purposes is required to have a Commercial Driver's License, which requires certain specialized knowledge and driving skills. Although the drivers of these vehicles are not required to possess a Commercial Driver's License, they should still understand and be familiar with the handling characteristics of their vans, especially when the van is fully loaded.

NHTSA's analysis reinforces the value of seat belts. Eighty percent of those nationwide who died last year in single vehicle rollovers last year were not buckled up. Wearing seat belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash. NHTSA urges that institutions using 15-passenger vans require seat belt use at all times.

NHTSA is making this information available because of these findings and because of several highly publicized rollover accidents involving 15-passenger vans loaded with college students (often driven by a fellow student rather than a professional driver).

While federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students, no such prohibition exists for vehicles to transport college students or other passengers.

A copy of the NHTSA analysis of the rollover characteristics of 15-passenger vans can be found at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-12/23rev.html>.

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News

NHTSA 27-02 **Contact: Rae Tyson**
Monday, April 15, 2002 Telephone: (202) 366-9550

NHTSA Repeats Rollover Warning To Users of 15-Passenger Vans

The nation's top motor vehicle safety executive, Jeffrey Runge, M.D., head of the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), today reissued a cautionary warning to users of 15-passenger vans because of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions. A similar warning was issued in 2001.

The safety agency also unveiled a consumer flyer for users of 15-passenger vans.

NHTSA research has shown that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases from fewer than five to more than ten. In fact, 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) had a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded.

"Because of these risks, it is vital that users of 15-passenger vans be aware of some safety precautions that will significantly reduce the risk," said Dr. Runge.

- Among the recommendations are the following:
- It is important that 15-passenger vans be operated by trained, experienced drivers.
- Insist that all occupants wear seat belts at all times. Eighty percent of those who died in 15-passenger van rollovers nationwide in the year 2000 were not buckled up. Wearing seat belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash. In fatal, single-vehicle rollovers involving 15-passenger vans over the past decade, 92 percent of belted occupants survived.

NHTSA is reissuing this advisory to specifically alert summertime users of 15-passenger vans. The agency also has prepared a flyer on 15-passenger van safety that is available on the web at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/studies/15PassVans/Index.htm. The agency also is considering the potential benefits of an additional warning label about rollover and seat belt use that would be visible to the driver and passengers of 15-passenger vans, respectively.

While federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students, no such prohibition exists for vehicles to transport college students or other passengers.

A copy of the NHTSA analysis of the rollover characteristics of 15-passenger vans can be found at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-30/ncsa/AvailInf.html> under "Research Notes". The new consumer advisory also is available at: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2002&filename=Apr15advisory.html>.

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News

NHTSA 25-04
Tuesday, June 1, 2004

Contact: Rae Tyson
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NHTSA Repeats Rollover Warning to Users of 15-Passenger Vans

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) today re-issued a warning to users of 15-passenger vans because of an increased rollover risk under certain conditions. Similar warnings were issued in 2001 and 2002.

The safety agency also unveiled an updated consumer hangtag for users of 15-passenger vans and released three related research reports. One of the reports is a detailed analysis of 15-passenger van crashes between 1990 and 2002.

The newly released NHTSA research reinforces the fact that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that increases dramatically as the number of occupant's increases to full capacity. In fact, the likelihood of a rollover when a van is fully loaded is about five times greater than when the vehicle contains only a driver. While an increased likelihood of rollover is present for other types of fully loaded passenger vehicles, it is most pronounced for 15-passenger vans.

The new NHTSA analysis also showed that the risk of rollover increased significantly at speeds over 50 miles per hour and on curved roads.

NHTSA is re-issuing this advisory to specifically alert those who plan to use the vans this summer for group road trips.

"It is vitally important that users of 15-passenger vans be aware of these risks," said NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D. "It is critical that users follow safety precautions to significantly reduce those risks."

Among the safety recommendations are the following:

- It is important that 15-passenger vans be operated by trained, experienced drivers.
- Insist that all occupants wear safety belts at all times. In fact, 76 percent of those who died in 15-passenger van rollovers nationwide in single vehicle crashes from 1990 to 2002 were not buckled up. An unrestrained 15-passenger van occupant involved in a single vehicle crash is about three times as likely to be killed as a restrained occupant.
- If possible, have passengers and cargo forward of the rear axle and avoid placing any loads on the roof.
- Check your tires: Excessively worn or improperly inflated tires can lead to a loss-of-control situation and a rollover. At least once a month, check that the vans tires are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down.

According to NHTSA research, between 1990 and 2002, there were 1,576 15-passenger vans involved in fatal crashes. Of these, 349 were single vehicle rollover crashes.

In separate research reports involving 15-passenger vans, NHTSA also examined the effects of tire pressure on rollover resistance and assessed the viability of electronic stability control (ESC) systems. The study, using a 2003 Ford F-350 and a 2004 GMC Savana, found that ESC could have some safety benefits under certain conditions.

While federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students, no such prohibition exists for vehicles to transport college students or other adult passengers.

All the documentation released today, including the agency's comprehensive plan to improve 15-passenger van safety, can be found at
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/studies/15PassVans/15PassCustomerAdvisory.htm>

NHTSA 12-05
Thursday, May 26, 2005

Contact: Rae Tyson,
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NHTSA Restates Rollover Warning For Users of 15-Passenger Vans

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) today announced new research that reinforces its existing concerns about 15-passenger vans. As a result, NHTSA reissued its consumer advisory for users of 15-passenger vans for the third time in the past four years.

In a new research report related to improper tire maintenance on 15-passenger vans, the NHTSA study found that 74 percent of all 15-passenger vans had significantly mis-inflated tires. By contrast, 39 percent of passenger cars were found with significant inflation problems. NHTSA research has consistently shown that improperly inflated tires can change handling characteristics, increasing the prospect of a rollover crash in 15-passenger vans.

"The vans are convenient, but drivers and passengers have to use extra caution. The risks associated with 15-passenger vans can be minimized if users take some basic safety precautions", said Jeffrey Runge, M.D, NHTSA administrator. "Routinely checking the condition of the tires, including the tire pressure, should be at the top of the list".

To reduce the risks associated with 15-passenger vans, NHTSA's safety advisory recommends that drivers insist all occupants wear safety belts at all times; drivers of 15-passenger are trained and experienced; tires are checked at least once a week, using the manufacturer's recommended pressure levels; and no loads are placed on the roof of the vehicle.

Prior NHTSA research has shown that 15-passenger vans have a rollover risk that increases dramatically as the number of occupants increases from fewer than five to more than ten. In fact, 15-passenger vans (with 10 or more occupants) had a rollover rate in single vehicle crashes that is nearly three times the rate of those that were lightly loaded (with fewer than five occupants).

Nearly 80 percent of those who died in 15-passenger van rollovers nationwide between 1990 and 2003 were not buckled up. Wearing safety belts dramatically increases the chances of survival during a rollover crash. In fatal, single-vehicle rollovers involving 15-passenger vans over the past decade, 91 percent of belted occupants survived.

NHTSA is reissuing this advisory to specifically alert summertime users of 15-passenger vans. The agency also has prepared a flyer on 15-passenger van safety that is available on the 15-Passenger Van Advisory page here <http://nhtsa.gov/cars/problems/studies/15PassVans/15PassCustomerAdvisory.htm>.

The public is responding to safety information about 15-passenger vans. Fatalities from 15-passenger van rollover van crashes have declined 35 percent since advisories began in 2001.

While Federal law prohibits the sale of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students, no such prohibition exists for vehicles to transport college students or other passengers. An interpretation of this Federal law can be found at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/interps/files/17730.drn.htm>.

A copy of the NHTSA study on tire maintenance can be found at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/RNotes/2005/809846.pdf> under "Research Notes".