

**State of Wisconsin  
12/15 Passenger Vans  
Driver, Training, & Usage Policy Guidelines (July 2017)**

**BACKGROUND:**

Studies conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reveal that loaded 15-passenger vans have significantly higher risk of rollover than passenger cars and light trucks. Loading the vans raises the center of gravity and shifts it towards the rear greatly affecting the handling characteristics. When heavily loaded the steering characteristics and responsiveness are very different from light passenger vehicles, this can cause serious consequences in an emergency situation when an untrained driver expects the vehicle to respond like a car. Driving large vans requires skill and experience from the operator, with little or no margin of error. The vehicles must also be in proper working order to reduce the likelihood of involvement in an accident. NHTSA has shown that the chance of survival in a rollover type accident is greatly enhanced by the proper use of seatbelts.

Numerous state agencies and university campuses are utilizing alternative methods of transportation to reduce risk exposures from 15-passenger vans. For those agencies that must continue use of these vehicles to conduct business, the greater potential that multiple people being injured during 15-passenger van crashes cannot be ignored. Additionally, these vehicles do not have reinforced glass, roll bars, reinforced steel frames, emergency doors or warning devices. Consistency and adequacy of the State van driver training program is necessary, not only for the safety of agency drivers and passengers, but all others on the road. Further, since there is no research to support that 12 passenger vans should be excluded from van driver requirements, those vehicles will be treated the same as 15 passenger vans.

**MODIFICATIONS TO DRIVER AGREEMENT FORM**

The Driver Agreement form signed by the 15-passenger van driver should be revised to include the following language:

I will not engage in activities while driving which may cause distraction or unsafe driving such as texting, using a handheld cell phone, etc.

I will not operate a 12/15-passenger van while my ability or alertness is so impaired, or so likely to become impaired, through fatigue, illness or any other cause, as to make it unsafe for me to begin or continue to operate the vehicle.

Within 8 hours prior to a drive and during a drive, I shall not possess, be under the influence of, or use, alcohol or any of the following drugs or other substances:

- (i) Any 21 CFR 1308.11 Schedule I substance\*;
- (ii) An amphetamine or any formulation thereof;
- (iii) A narcotic drug or any derivative thereof; or
- (iv) Any other substance, to a degree which renders the driver incapable of safely operating a motor vehicle.

These include a variety of prescription and over-the-counter drugs (such as cold medicines) which may make a driver drowsy or otherwise affect safe driving ability. I will pay attention to warning labels of legitimate drugs and medicines and to doctor's orders regarding possible

effects. I will not use any drug that hides fatigue. I will avoid any medication with a label warning against operating vehicles or machinery or which notes it may cause drowsiness. However, possession or use of a drug administered to me by or under the instructions of a licensed medical practitioner is permitted if they have advised me that the substance will not affect my ability to safely operate a motor vehicle.

*\*21 CFR 1308.11 Schedule I can be found at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/cfr-retrieve.html> – Select ‘Most Recent Available’ for Revision Year, type ‘21’ for Title, ‘1308’ for Part, and ‘11’ for Section. Then click “Retrieve”.*

The Van Driver Agreement form should also offer or remind the driver that they may voluntarily take the van driver refresher course at any time.

### **TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:**

- All New Drivers are required to complete an authorized van driver training course (including classroom and behind the wheel components)
- All Drivers must take an approved refresher van driving course every three years. Refresher training can be completed via classroom, behind the wheel, or online.
- A Driver who has an at-fault van accident with a state-owned vehicle may be required to repeat the refresher course within ninety (90) days of the accident. The employee’s supervisor (or Van Pool Manager for Van Pool Drivers) in consultation with their Agency’s Management and Risk Management is responsible for ensuring that the employee takes the refresher course.

### **TRAINING SPECIFICS:**

#### **Van Driver Instructor Qualifications** (at least one of the following)

- Federal DOT course
- National Safety Council Certified Instructor or equivalent
- In-house certified trainer

Each agency with 12/15-passenger van drivers will submit to the Bureau of State Risk Management (BSRM) the criteria it will be using to certify its trainers to approve. If using in-house trainers, the agency will be responsible for certifying those trainers as qualified instructors of 12/15 passenger van drivers. The in-house trainers must be as qualified as external authorized trainers. All trainers must follow the curriculum for basic classroom training and behind the wheel training that is included in the state van driver training standards listed in this document.

#### **Basic Classroom Training**

Minimum of 100 minutes, with a classroom test at the end that must be passed before the student can participate in behind-the-wheel training. Recommended class size is six to eight students with eight students being the maximum allowed.

A pre-test should be conducted on the rules of the road (preferably done on-line) so that the classroom training can focus on passenger van operation. The classroom curriculum should include the following, many of which are addressed in the owner's manual for a 12/15-passenger van:

- Defensive driving skills
- Speed management – 3 second rule
- Speed illusion
- Extreme driving conditions – ice/snow/rain/wind
- Center of gravity – weight distribution
- Space management
- Turning radius
- Lane changes
- Parking
- Backing
- Loading/unloading – seating of passengers – mandatory seatbelt use for all occupants at all times
- Hazard perception
- Emergency maneuvers
- Animal hazards
- Oversteering
- Braking – ABS or not – distance needed to stop
- Off-road recovery
- Skid control & recovery
- Pre-trip checks, including tire maintenance guidelines, lights, horn, windshield wipers & washer fluid, oil, mirrors, seatbelts
- Passenger safety/protection – flares, fire extinguisher
- Driver/passenger relationships – driver distractions
- Roadside maintenance
- Night operations
- Blind spots - visibility – using mirrors
- Railroad crossings
- Lights on for safety
- Statistics (NHTSA ‘Characteristics of Fatal Rollover Crashes’ Technical Report)
- NHTSA’s ‘Reducing the Risk of Rollover Crashes in 15-Passenger Vans’

### **Behind-the-wheel Training**

BTW class size should be six to eight students. Minimum of 30 minutes driving time behind the wheel for each student in varied traffic situations in a group setting. Each student should exhibit competency in van driving skills, including the following:

- Pre-driving check – loading, seatbelts, visual check of tires, lights, etc.
- Drive vans that are fully loaded and not
- Highway speeds
- Emergency braking
- Tracking differences – turning/backing
- Parking – backing
- Lack of visibility – lane change, turns
- Height of vehicle – speed sense

### **Recommended Driver Log**

Daily visual checks and weekly tire maintenance – DCTF-4557, DHFS’s Trip Ticket, is a good example of what could be included in a log. Items to be checked either ‘ok’ or ‘no’ are: oil level, water level, wipers, tire inflation, oil pressure gauge, temperature gauge, fuel gauge, head/signal/tail/flasher lights, power steering/cruise control, emergency equipment, mirrors (including side mirrors), doors and windows working.

### **Suggested other risk control measures to reduce the number of crashes**

Although not mandatory, agencies may wish to consider the following safety options:

1. Van driver should refrain from use of hand-held mobile communication devices.
2. Speed control warning device to go off at 70 mph – this will alert a driver who is speeding
3. Additional mirrors to assist drivers in backing the vehicle.
4. Back-up beepers – these come as a bulb that simply replaces the factory back up bulb and will remind the driver to look where they are backing at the same time it warns others to the backing vehicle.
5. Reminder card listing the major causes of crashes.

### **Minimum Standards for Driving State-owned/Leased/Rented 12/15 Passenger Vans**

The Bureau of State Risk Management is charged with the responsibility of protecting the public and the state’s physical assets from loss. In a joint effort with the state agencies, the following minimum standards have been developed to provide state agencies and/or agency risk managers with guidance in applying sound risk management principles to the usage of 12/15 passenger vans for the state.

#### **Agencies should devise a method to reasonably assure that these standards and guidelines are followed.**

The following **minimum standards** are to be used by state agencies when employees/agents are driving state-owned/leased/rented 12/15 passenger vans on state business. An agency may operate under more stringent standards if required for operational or business needs.

#### **A state employee/agent may be allowed to drive a state-owned/leased/rented 12/15 passenger van if all of the following minimum standards are met:**

1. Must have a valid driver license,
2. Must have a minimum of five (5) years licensed driving experience. (Alternatively, a driver who is at least 21 years of age with a Class B or C CDL [Commercial Driver License] endorsed for passengers may drive 12/15 passenger vans only within the State of Wisconsin.),
3. Must have taken approved new van driver training course, and
4. To remain a qualified driver, must be certified by the driver’s agency as having met the refresher van driver training requirements.

**A state employee/agent may not drive a state-owned/leased/rented 12/15 passenger van if their driving record reflects any of the following conditions:**

- Three or more moving violations and/or at-fault accidents in the past two years.
- An OWI or DUI violation within the past year. (OWI/DUI violations are for operating while under the influence of an intoxicant, controlled substance or other drug.)

**VAN POLICY**

The number of passengers must not exceed the maximum capacity of the vehicle.

All exterior-mounted cargo carriers are prohibited.

Seatbelt use by all van occupants is required. The vehicle may not be operated unless everyone in the van is belted.

Before trailering with a 12/15 passenger van, an agency must determine that it needs to do so to carry out its business functions. Refer to the trailering policy for further information.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DRIVERS OF 12/15 PASSENGER VANS:**

Avoid driving between midnight and 5 a.m.

Avoid driving more than two consecutive hours without at least a 15 to 30 minute rest stop.

Be aware of how physical activity and nutrition affect sleep/alertness. The easiest and most successful measure to prevent drowsiness is to have adequate and continuous sleep before driving – create a quiet, cool, dark environment, and allow sufficient time for sleep and try to sleep during the same hours each day.

Remember the restrictions agreed upon in the driver use agreement related to abstinence from drugs and alcohol.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER GUIDELINES:**

If it is unsafe to drive, DON'T. Contact your supervisor if you have concerns about postponing your trip or modifying your travel plans.

Look and listen to local road and weather reports and follow their recommendations. Stay informed on changing weather conditions throughout your trip, as well as road closures and conditions.

Do not drive in inclement weather unless necessary. When travel is necessary, wait for the weather and roads to clear before departing or continuing on a trip whenever possible. Allow extra travel time. Always use your headlights. Decrease speed. If you cannot see the edges of the road or other vehicles at a safe distance, stop at a protected area.