



15 Passenger Van - Change in Policy

Background

Research has shown that 15-passenger vans manufactured before 2010 had a dramatic rollover risk which led to prohibiting the use of 15-passenger vans for school age children under regulations issued pursuant to the Federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act and under the Virginia Administrative Code (<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter70/>).

In May 2018, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said that nearly 60 percent of fatalities involving 15-passenger vans were a result of the vehicles rolling over. Following the concerns from NHTSA, the diocese extended the prohibited use of 15-passenger vans to include all ages.

NHTSA does not allow multifunction school activity buses, which by definition includes 12 and 15 passenger vans, to transport school age children to and from home or bus stops; however, vans may be used for school activities provided the vehicle follows all of the school bus safety requirements, except the flashing lights and stop arms ([School Bus Safety | NHTSA](#)).

Since August 2018, the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services allowed each state to permit the use of large vans to transport school children. The Virginia Council for Private Education states each private school should make their own decision about the type of vehicle to transport preschool children and school age children to activities or other events (2021-2022 edition of *Virginia Law and Private Schools, Activity Buses*).

Present Situation

The 15-passenger vans manufactured after 2010 come equipped with advanced safety technology that help address their risk of rolling over. Features include automatic emergency braking, collision and lane departure warnings, stability control, tire pressure monitoring, and laminated glass. Virginia does not prohibit the use of 15-passenger vans for private schools, churches, or for daycare facilities, and has lifted the restriction for public schools when the vans are treated as a school bus.

A new problem has occurred when the parishes and school try to rent 12-passenger vans. The rental car agencies are eliminating the 12-passenger vans and replacing their inventory with the 15-passenger vans.

Policy Change

Effective January 1, 2022, all parishes and schools are permitted to use 15-passenger vans manufactured after 2010 with the adoption of the following safety precautions identified by the NHTSA:

NHTSA's 15-Passenger Van Safety Precautions

- Experience: 15-passenger vans should only be driven by experienced drivers who operate these types of vehicles on a regular basis.
- Attention: Never drive distracted, and always stay focused on the task of driving.
- Speed: Always obey the speed limit and adjust the speed based on weather and road conditions.
- Seat Belts: All occupants need to wear seat belts when the vehicle is moving.
- Tire Pressure: Tires and tire pressure should be checked before every single use.
- Spares: Don't use old spares on the van. Purchase a new spare when buying new tires.
- Occupancy: Never allow more than 15 people in a 15-passenger van.
- Cargo: Store cargo forward of the rear axle. Avoid overloading the vehicle or placing any loads on the roof.
- Size: These vehicles are larger and longer than cars, so use mirrors accordingly.