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Contact: Rae Tyson
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: www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/.

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