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Tuesday, July 15, 2003

Government: GM, Ford should make 15-passenger vans safer

By Dee-Ann Durbin / Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- **General Motors Corp.** and **Ford Motor Co.** should make numerous changes to their 15-passenger vans by 2006 in order to make them safer, the National Transportation Safety Board said Tuesday.

The companies should install lap-and-shoulder seat belts in all seating positions and make those belts more accessible, the NTSB said. The NTSB also recommended that the companies improve interiors and strengthen roofs to prevent head injuries during rollover crashes.

The NTSB only has the power to recommend changes, but NTSB Chairwoman Ellen Engleman made it clear that the board wants to see action.

"Recommendations are not enough. We want them to be implemented," she said.

GM spokesman Jim Schell said GM already had plans to make some of the changes by 2008 but will consider the NTSB's recommendations.

"They're asking the automakers to accelerate that," he said. "We have a history of meeting regulations earlier, but I can't say that we'll be able to do that right away."

Schell said GM's 15-passenger vans already meet federal standards for head injury prevention, and 11 of the van's 15 seats have lap-and-shoulder belts. On the issue of roof crush, Schell said most injuries happen when an unbelted passenger's head hits the roof, rather than the roof crushing on the occupant's head.

On the Net:

National Transportation Safety Board, <http://www.nts.gov/>

Ford, <http://www.ford.com>

GM, <http://www.gm.com>

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