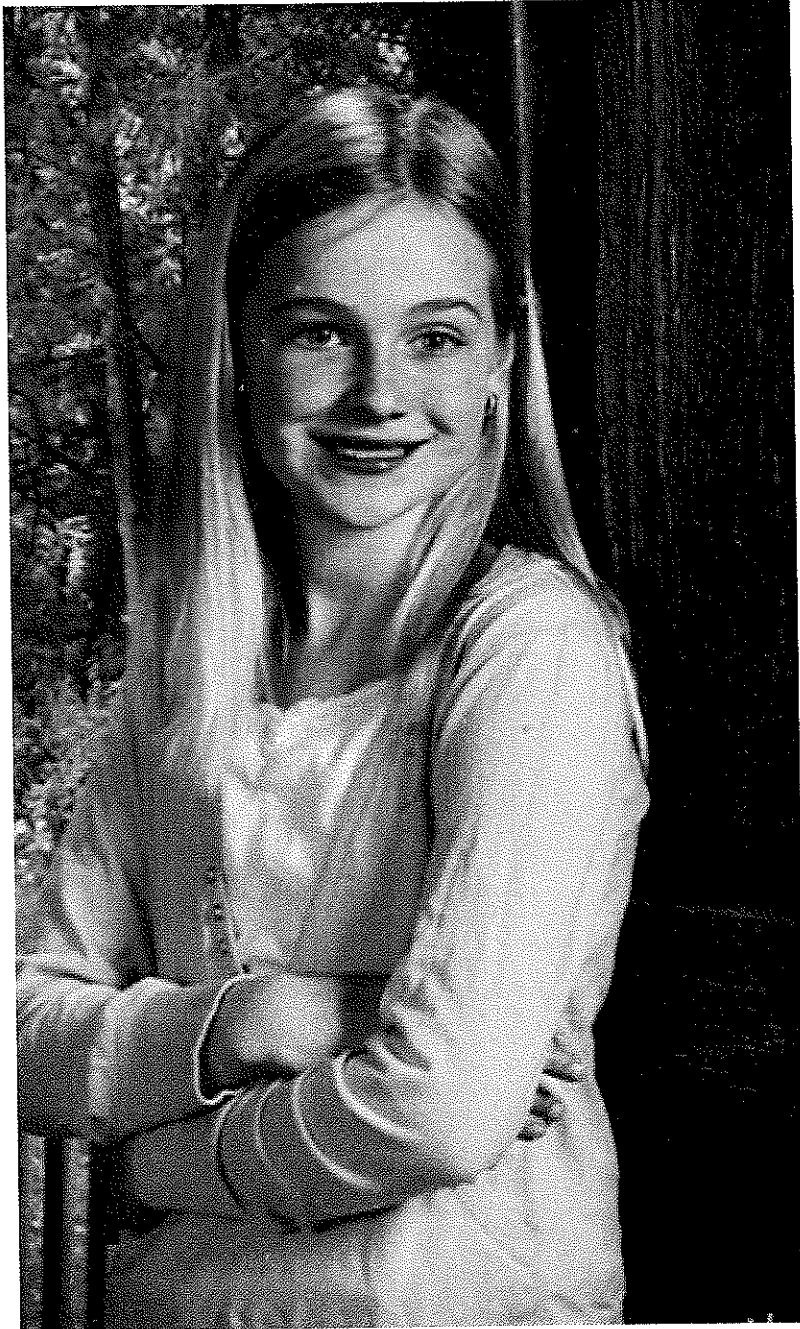


American Center

for

Van and Tire Safety

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Alexis James
1997-2007

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Statement by Patrick James

July 16, 2008

Good morning, my name is Patrick James and I am here with my wife Kelli and son Austin to talk with you about the deadly combination of 15-passenger vans, aged tires and vehicles that are rollover prone and lack occupant protections.

I am testifying before this committee one year to the day that I last talked with my daughter. She was excited about going to play with her old softball team in a tournament in Savannah Georgia the following day. Twenty-four hours later my family and many friends' lives were changed forever. At 12:30 PM on July 17th, 2007 we started receiving phone calls from friends informing us that Alexis had been in an accident. The vans' left rear tire had ample tread and looked like new. But it was 13 years old. And when it failed on a highway in South Carolina, the van rolled over and my daughter was ejected—even though she was wearing her seat belt. I was pulling into the airport parking lot when I received a phone call from the ER doctor. He informed me that my daughter, "Lexie" James had died from heart failure. I remember sitting in my car looking into the lobby of the airport watching my wife and son, and knowing what I had to do—go tell her mom and brother that Alexis had passed away.

I never gave a second thought to the vehicle Lexie would be taking to her tournament. But I have spent the last 12 months learning everything I could about 15-passenger vans and tire safety. And what I found out stunned me.

These vehicles, which were first introduced in the 1970s and have changed little since, have a long history of single-vehicle rollover accidents and a general lack of crashworthiness. They are more prone to rollover than other vehicles and have higher rollover fatality rates than other passenger vehicles. The odds of rollover for a 15-passenger van increase more than 400 percent when the van is fully loaded. From 1997 to 2006, 15-passenger van crashes caused 1,090 occupant fatalities. 534 of these people died in preventable crashes.

I have also learned that tires degrade over time and heat exposure, regardless of whether they have been used or have adequate tread. As early as 1990, some auto manufacturers began warning consumers about the use of tires older than six years. Last August, NHTSA submitted a report to Congress on tire aging that affirmed this warning. The agency cited statistics from a large insurance company showing that 27 percent of its policy holders were from the warm weather states of Texas, California, Louisiana, Florida, and Arizona. But 77 percent of the tire claims came from those states and 84 percent of these claims were for tires over 6 years old. According to a survey by the Rubber Manufacturers Association, 16.4 percent of tires in service are six years old or older.

Most tires will wear out before they "age out." But, there are many circumstances in which older tires end up on vehicles. The most common is the full-size spare that is put into service after many years in the trunk or under the car. Many 15-passenger vans, are owned by community groups that don't use them on a daily or even a weekly basis. If the annual mileage is low, the possibility exists that the tires could exceed their safe, useful life. Our small-scale study found that about 23 percent of 15-passenger vans surveyed have tires that are ten or more years old.

I didn't know any of that before July 17, 2007. But I have dedicated that last year to informing as many people as I can about these facts. And in February my family founded the American Center for Van and Tire Safety, to warn the public about these significant dangers.

Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned is that that 15-passenger van rollover crashes are the most extreme and horrifying example of what is missing in our current rollover occupant protection regulations and that tire age degradation is something most people, including tire service professionals, are unaware of.

In any crash, it isn't just one thing that saves the driver or the passenger from injury or death. It isn't one thing that keeps the crash from happening in the first place. It's a lot of elements working together. And as I sit before you now, on July 16, 2008 – knowing everything I know – there are still many pieces missing in our federal safety regulations to prevent and reduce the harm from rollover crashes.

We've taken a few forward steps. Many federal safety standards for passenger vehicles and light trucks have been expanded to include new 15-passenger vans. The SAFETEA-LU bill of 2005 requires NHTSA to issue a report on tire aging. The agency has begun to upgrade the roof crush standard. And, last month, it issued a consumer advisory that included some information about aged tires.

But the roof crush standard has stalled. The final tire aging report with rulemaking recommendations remains in the agency's hands. It's still near impossible for the average person – or even a service technician – to read a tire date code or learn about the consumer advisory.

Our goal now is to push for improvements to 15-passenger vans, to eliminate aged tires from our fleet and to keep these issues in front of the public.

But my family and our organization cannot do it alone. So, I'd like to close my testimony with a little bit of automotive history and a challenge. Forty-three years ago, almost to this very day, there was another Congressional hearing on the effectiveness of NHTSA's programs. The hearings continued over a week in mid-July. The witnesses included executives from all of the major American automakers.

The centerpiece of Ford Motor Company's testimony was a short movie demonstrating the crashworthiness of a 1961 Comet.

Picture – if you will – a grainy black-and-white film of a white sedan heading for a ramp. The ramp tips the passenger-side wheels and the Comet rolls over twice. The cameras inside of the car show the seat belted dummies in the front, bounced by the crash forces, but otherwise, unharmed. When the Comet comes to rest upright, the roof is intact and the dummies are still in their seats.

I'm not sure how many automakers today could show such a film to Congress. I do know that in 1965, manufacturers were on the path to building vehicles that offered significant occupant protection in rollovers. But in the absence of regulatory standards, we have strayed far from that path. We have spent decades building vehicles that were more prone to rollovers – instead of less – with weaker roofs – instead of stronger – and restraint systems that do not work in that moment when our lives depend on them.

Lexie died before she grew up and made her own way in the world. But that does not mean she cannot leave a lasting legacy. With your help, it can be one that will spare others the pain of knowing that a loved one died in a crash that they should have survived.

Despite the improvements to 15-passenger van design required by SAFETEA-LU – as of July 2006 – there were still more than half-a million 15-passenger vans on our roads. These vans are *not* equipped with the latest safety features. In fact they are based on 30-year-old technology. And they are being used by schools, churches and day care centers to transport our elderly, our children, our athletes and our choirs. It is not enough to launch another education and awareness campaign. These messages work their way slowly into the public's consciousness. Consider that NHTSA had already issued three consumer advisories warning the public about the dangers of 15-passenger vans, when Lexie died in one.

My challenge to industry is this: help send these older and very dangerous vehicles to the scrap yard. Fifteen-passenger vans are the only vehicles in our fleet that cannot be used safely as intended. That irony would be merely absurd, if the consequences of it weren't so tragic. Automakers should work to offer financial incentives to the community groups that need their vans, but lack the resources to replace them with safer transportation.

As for the regulators – NHTSA, and their overseers, the honorable members of Congress, we ask you to conduct a national survey on tire age in 15-passenger vans and warn consumers about this fatal combination. Ultimately, we'd like to see expiration dates clearly printed on the outside sidewall of every passenger vehicle tire or the use of current technologies like Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) to ensure a quick and easy read of a tire's age.

I urge you to get to work on a standard for a dynamic rollover occupant protection test. NHTSA is absolutely right to approach each rollover-related rulemaking as a part of a system. But the system is still missing a critical element – how will the driver and the passengers actually fare in a rollover? We need a standard that requires instrumented dummies to measure what happens to *people* in rollovers – not just metal and glass. What good is it to test one side of the roof with a metal plate, if the front seat passenger's head is going to be crushed in a crash along with the B-pillar? We need to know that the seat belts and whatever anchors them in a vehicle are going to withstand the impacts of a rollover – so that the 10-year-old girl in that seatbelt is going to withstand it, too. If we don't seek the answers to these questions, then what, exactly, are we accomplishing?

Manufacturers have resisted a dynamic rollover testing standard for decades. It can't be done, they say. And NHTSA has retreated. But if Ford can showcase its rollover testing to Congress in 1965; if GM could parade its 10-million-dollar rollover testing center two years ago for the television cameras, then it *can* be done. In fact, manufacturers *are* doing it and *have* been doing it. And instead of fighting a standard, they should be supporting it and offering the agency the benefits of their years of such testing.

I know that protecting people in rollover crashes is a complex challenge, but Americans are actually good at solving complex problems. Sometimes, I think we forget that. We are up to the challenge. It's time to do the right thing – for Lexie. For all of us.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

American Center for Van and Tire Safety

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Desired actions ...

1. NHTSA to complete the study on tire aging and issue appropriate standards, rules and guidelines in 2009. The goal of American Center for Van and Tire Safety is to have appropriate expiration dates clearly printed on the outside sidewall of all passenger vehicle tires.
2. Obtain federal funding for a "National Van and Tire Safety Awareness Week" as part of the federal highway bill in 2009.
3. Commission NHTSA to conduct a nationwide study of 15-passenger van annual mileage and tire age in 2009. If the study shows a high percentage of tires over six years old (as was the case in the Knoxville Study done by American Center for Van and Tire Safety in 2008), issue a consumer warning to all owner/operators of 15-passenger vans nationwide.
4. Include 15-passenger vans in NCAP front impact and side impact star ratings.
5. Develop and implement a more comprehensive system/procedure for distribution of NHTSA and NTSB consumer advisories and alerts to insure the advisories and alerts reach the intended target population.
6. Challenge the auto manufacturers (Ford, GM and Chrysler) to offer a "buy back" program for older 15-passenger vans that don't have the safety features of today's vehicles ... Offer could include a generous credit for a new 15-passenger van or better yet a small bus.
7. Include 15-passenger vans in all appropriate future Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards and/or revisions of current standards. Standards that apply to SUV's, minivans and related multi-passenger vehicles should also apply to 15-passenger vans.
8. Require all occupants of 15-passenger vans to wear seat belts/restraints in all states.
9. Require a disclosure statement (NHTSA advisory) to be attached whenever a 15-passenger van title is transferred (new or used).
10. Require a disclosure statement (NHTSA advisory) to be attached whenever a 15-passenger van insurance policy is issued or renewed.
11. Require an "endorsement" (similar to the "motorcycle endorsement" required in most states to operate a motorcycle) on driver's license for operation of 15-passenger van. The endorsement is to be based on training and testing on the safe operation of 15-passenger vans. In addition, all operators of 15-passenger vans in commercial service must have a commercial driver's license (CDL).
12. Require all rental/leasing agencies to attach a disclosure statement (NHTSA advisory) to all lease/rental agreements for 15-passenger vans.

13. Commission NHTSA to determine the distribution of ownership of 15-passenger vans. Monitor the ownership of these vans to determine ownership trends. If ownership is shifting from companies/organizations to individuals issue a consumer warning to those individuals.
14. Include tire TIN in the FARS database to obtain better data on the scope and relationship of "aged" tire failures to fatal accidents.
15. Expand inspection procedures, in the states that require vehicle inspections, to include tire age and load rating in addition to tread depth.

July 9, 2008

American Center for Van and Tire Safety

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Mission Statement

To reduce the number of fatalities in accidents involving 15-passenger vans and/or “aged” tire failures by ...

- Bringing awareness of the dangers of 15-passenger vans and the dangers of “aged” tires to as many of the general public as possible
- Developing and promoting guidelines for safer operation of 15-passenger vans and to reduce the risk of “aged” tire failures
- Working with legislators and NHTSA to improve and enhance the design, performance, testing & reporting requirements and safe operation of 15-passenger vans and tires

Dedication

This company is dedicated to Alexis “Lexie” James and to all of those who have lost their lives in vehicle accidents ... especially those who have died in 15-passenger van single vehicle rollover accidents caused by the massive failure of an “aged” tire.

Motto

“And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”

- Abraham Lincoln -

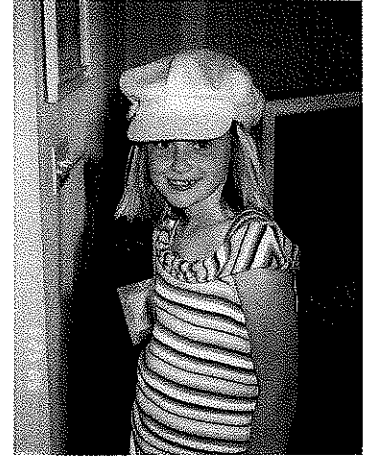
Patrick James & Roderick Koehler
January 2008

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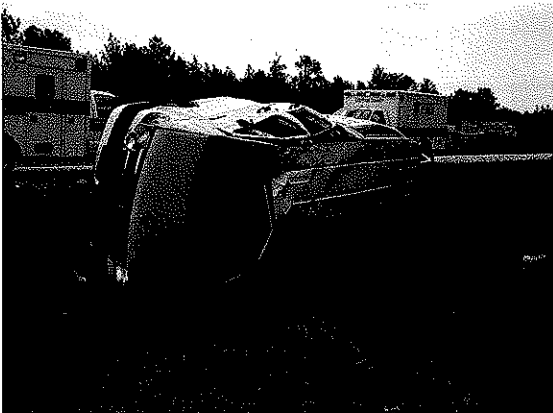
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My name is Patrick James. This is a picture of my ten year old daughter, Alexis James. She was killed July 17, 2007 in a 15-passenger van accident in South Carolina. The accident resulted from the failure of the left rear tire. When the tire failed the van rolled over and my daughter was ejected from the vehicle, even though she was wearing her seat belt. It was a lap belt only, 3-point lap/shoulder belts were not required in this van when it was manufactured in 1994. According to the accident report, the weather was clear, all were wearing their seat belts and the van was being operated within posted speed limits. No citations were issued. At the time, she was traveling with close family friends from Greenville, SC to Savannah, GA on I-26. She was an avid softball player and was on her way to play in a tournament in Savannah with her team. She was the only one ejected from the vehicle and the only one to have fatal injuries. Four others were in the van ... two adults and two additional children ... they all received minor injuries.



After the accident I did some research into 15-passenger vans and found that they have experienced significant rollover problems since they were first introduced in the early 70's. Further, they have not been subjected to the same federal safety standards and test requirements as have been applied to similar multi passenger vehicles such as SUVs and minivans.

This is a picture of the van in which my daughter was riding. This shows the damage to a 15-passenger van that can be expected when a rollover occurs while traveling at legal interstate highway speed.



Over the years there have been numerous fatal, single vehicle rollover accidents with these 15-passenger vans. Many of these resulted from rear tire failures virtually identical to the accident that killed my daughter and have been documented by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

According to the NHTSA, from 1997 through 2006 there were 1,090 fatalities of van occupants resulting from crashes involving these 15-passenger vans. Of the 1,090 fatalities, 534 resulted from largely preventable single vehicle rollover crashes of the 15-passenger vans. The propensity for rollovers of these vans have been well known by the government and the manufacturers for years and until recently nothing more than consumer advisories have been issued by NHTSA.

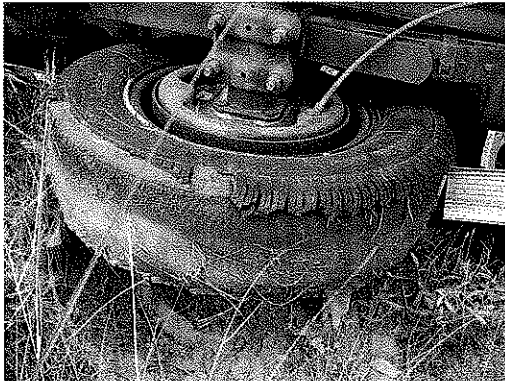
Within the last couple of years NHTSA has enacted new federal safety standards and rules to address a number of problems with these vehicles, as follows ...

1. Lap/shoulder belts are now required in all new vans for all seating positions.
2. All new vans must now be equipped with electronic stability control (ESC) to help reduce the risk of rollover.
3. All new vans must be equipped with tire pressure monitoring system to help reduce the risk of tire failure.
4. Many of the federal motor vehicle safety standards are being expanded to cover 15-passenger vans and to provide better containment and protection of occupants in the event of a rollover.
5. 15-passenger vans must now include rollover risk star rating on the new vehicle sticker.

These changes should improve the safety of new vans, but will do nothing for the estimated 550,000 15-passenger vans on the road.

Since the accident I have also found out that the tire that failed had been put on the van just prior to the fatal trip ... It was identical in size and rating to the original tires on the van... It appeared to be "new" and never used, but inspection of the tire after the accident revealed, from the DOT number, that it was thirteen years old. It was the unused spare tire. It was installed on the van at a tire dealership/shop and no mention was made as to the age of the tire or any possible danger. The accident report said the rear tires "appeared to be in new condition".

I have since discovered that tires "age" over time whether they are actually used on the road or not. It is a slow oxidation process that breaks down the internals that hold the tire together. In many cases there are no outward signs of this deterioration ... Because of numerous accidents and wrongful death law suits, many car and tire manufacturers are now recommending that tires (including the spare) be replaced after six years, regardless of the amount of tread. Various consumer groups have for years tried to get "expiration dates" on tires. To date, this effort has been successfully resisted by the tire manufacturers. They are required to show the date of manufacture on tires ... but no expiration date ... unfortunately, the date of manufacture is embedded in the



DOT code and frequently only on the inward sidewall making it difficult to read.

This is a picture of the tire that failed and caused my daughter's accident. Had an expiration date been on that tire, it would not have been installed on the van and the accident likely would never have happened.

Since the accident I have met with numerous legislators in Washington DC to investigate the safety of these vans. I have also had a meeting with NHTSA and communicated with NTSB to find out what they're doing to improve the safety of these vans. As mentioned above, much has been done to improve the safety of new vans being manufactured ... but ... more needs to be done to improve safety for both the new vans and the estimated 550,000 15-passenger vans currently on the road !

I believe there is a lack of public awareness of the dangers of these vans and the danger of "aged" tires. As a result, I have formed this non-profit company with the mission of bringing awareness of the dangers of these vans and of "aged" tires to as many people as possible in hopes that this effort will save lives. I plan to dedicate my life to this effort in honor of my daughter.

Although I would prefer that all 15-passenger vans be taken off the road, I realize this won't happen. ... so I'm asking that if you must drive a 15-passenger van or ride in one, please, please be aware of the dangers and follow the attached safety guidelines. I don't want another family to go through the pain I've experienced since Lexie's accident.

Please contact me if you have questions or comments.

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15-Passenger Van Safety Guidelines

1. When a 15-passenger van is not full, passengers are to sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.
2. Never allow more than 15 people to ride in a 15-passenger van.
3. Require all passengers and the driver to wear proper safety restraints (seat belts - preferably 3-point lap/shoulder belts) any time the van is in motion. Inspect seat belts regularly ... replace any missing, broken or damaged belts and/or buckles.
4. Inspect the tires, including the spare ... determine the date of manufacture of each tire from the DOT code (may only be on the inboard sidewall). The DOT code will end with either 3 numbers or 4 numbers ... if three numbers, the tire was manufactured in the 90's. the last number is the year and the first two are the week in that year ... example "168" would be the 16th week of 1998. If four numbers, the tire was manufactured in 2000 or later ... the first two numbers are the week and the last two numbers are the year ... example "2303" would be the 23rd week of 2003.
5. Replace all tires that are more than six years old. It is critical to remember that low mileage doesn't mean tires are safe. Tires deteriorate with time whether they are used or not ... And, unfortunately, dangerously deteriorated tires cannot always be detected by visual inspection alone. When buying new tires be sure to get the date of manufacture of each tire. If they are more than a year old, do not buy them. Remember they have a six year life from the date of manufacture not from the date they are installed on your van.
6. Be sure all tires are the proper size and load rating for the van. Recommended tire size and load rating should be in the owner's manual.
7. Inspect the tires before each use. Examine tires for uneven wear, cracks, and other damage. Replace any damaged tires.
8. Check tire pressure before each use. Beware ! ... required front and back tire pressures may be very different and are likely higher than required for car tires ... typically van tires must be inflated to 50 lbs. for the front tires and 80 lbs. in the rear tires. The manufacturer's recommended pressure is usually provided on the driver's doorsill or in the owner's manual.
9. Do not overload the van. See the owner's manual for maximum allowable total weight of passengers and cargo.
10. Do not strap any cargo onto the roof or back of the van.
11. Do not tow anything behind the van.
12. Be certain the driver has a valid driver's license for the state where they reside (a commercial driver's license is preferred). Be aware that van drivers need additional training since these vans handle differently than other vehicles, especially when fully loaded. Allow no one under the age of 21 to drive the van. Select one or two drivers to drive the van on a regular basis. Insist that a new driver get experience driving the van alone before driving with others in the van. Remember a 15-passenger van is substantially longer and wider than a car, thus it ...
 - Requires more space and additional reliance on the side-view mirrors for changing lanes.
 - Does not respond as well to abrupt steering maneuvers ... such as might occur with a blowout or dropping off the edge of the pavement.
 - Requires additional braking time.

13. Limit drive time to 8 hours per driver per 24 hours. Ban driving from midnight to 6 a.m. ... the van is dangerous enough without fatigue and poor visibility.
14. Be absolutely certain the driver is not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
15. The driver is to be well rested and attentive to driving. Prohibit use of a cell phone by the driver while the van is in motion. Limit conversation with other passengers.
16. Drive at a safe speed based on driving conditions ... never more than the speed limit ... and with a maximum of 60 mph regardless of the conditions and speed limit. Always slow down if the roads are wet or icy.
17. Keep the gas tank as full as practically possible. A full tank of gas lowers the center of gravity and reduces the risk of rollover.
18. Remove the last row of seating. Do not stow cargo in the van any higher than the bench level of the seats.

American Center for Van and Tire Safety

June 2008

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Facts supporting the need for an awareness program for owners and operators of 15-passenger vans

1. From 1997 through 2006 there were 1,090 fatalities of van occupants resulting from crashes involving 15-passenger vans. Of the 1,090 fatalities, 534 resulted from largely preventable single vehicle rollover crashes of the 15-passenger vans¹.
2. 15-passenger vans are more prone to rollover. In 2005, 59% of the fatalities in 15-passenger van crashes occurred in single-vehicle rollover crashes². This rate is higher than the rollover fatality rates for any other passenger vehicle type³.
3. The odds of rollover for a 15-passenger van increase more than 400 percent when the van is fully loaded compared with a driver traveling alone. This increase is significantly higher than the percentage increase in any other type of passenger vehicle⁴.
4. 15-passenger vans require special driver skills. They are larger, with high centers of gravity making them less stable than vehicles such as cars. Adding passengers increases the center of gravity causing them to be increasingly difficult to handle and less stable⁵.
5. The death rate for all occupants was higher for 15-passenger vans than for other passenger vehicle types combined. During the period 2001-05 the death rate for 15-passenger vans was 250 per million registered vehicles versus 151 for all other vehicles⁶.
6. Impressing upon 15-passenger van drivers the inherent dangers of operating these vehicles, particularly when fully loaded, and educating them about proper handling and control, particularly during emergency situations, can reduce the risk of rollover. Such training can also help dispel the expectation that these vans operate like large passenger cars⁷.
7. 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 survived⁸.
8. In 2002 only 14% of the 15-passenger van single vehicle fatalities were restrained as compared with 30% restrained in passenger cars⁹. This indicates a much lower use of seat belts by occupants of 15-passenger vans.

¹ Data received from NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis at a meeting on December 10, 2007.

² Insurance Institute for Highway Safety & Highway Loss Data Institute, Q&A 15-passenger vans – January 2007

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ NTSB letter to American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Assoc. dated August 4, 2003.

⁸ NHTSA news release dated May 26, 2005.

⁹ NHTSA report "Analysis of Crashes Involving 15-passenger Vans" (DOT #HS 809 735) dated May, 2004.

9. Recently there have been a number of safety improvements to new 15-passenger vans such as lap/shoulder belts in all seating positions, tire pressure monitoring systems, electronic stability control, expansion of several federal motor vehicle safety standards to now include 15-passenger vans ... all these will improve the safety of new 15-passenger vans but will do nothing for the estimated 550,000 vans currently on the road. Driver education and training, and general awareness of the dangers of these vans are the only viable means of reducing the death rates of these existing vans.
10. Even with all the above mentioned safety improvements, 15-passenger vans have low NCAP rollover ratings. The 2008 Ford E-350 15-passenger van has a two star (out of 5) rollover rating indicating a 30% to 40% risk of rollover¹⁰. The Ford E-350 accounts for approximately 80% of the 15-passenger vans sold annually¹¹. Thus, even with the safety improvements, training for safe operation to reduce the risk of rollover is still needed.
11. According to a 2005 report approximately 74% of all 15-passenger vans had at least one tire misinflated by 25% or more. This compares to 39% of passenger cars with at least one tire misinflated by 25% or more¹². This indicates a lack of training on proper tire maintenance. Over the last ten years tires were a related factor for approximately 20% of all 15-passenger van single vehicle rollover accidents as compared to approximately 3% for all other passenger vehicles¹³.
12. According to a 2008 survey of church and university 15-passenger vans in the Knoxville TN area, the average annual usage of these vans is approximately 6,600 miles per year. Applying this average annual mileage to 15-passenger vans nationally and to the 2006 15-passenger van fatalities, yields a calculated fatality rate per mile driven, for 15-passenger vans, that is 20% higher than for all other passenger vehicles combined.¹⁴
13. These vans have primarily been sold to various schools, universities, churches, day cares and other similar community organizations. As the dangers of these vans have become more apparent and as both federal and state legislation has been passed limiting the use of these vans, many of the vans have been sold by the various organizations to private citizens. In most cases this has been done without disclosure of the dangers these vans pose and the differences in safely operating these vans as opposed to other passenger vehicles. These private citizens purchasing these vans must be made aware of the dangers and precautions to safely operate the vehicles.

Prepared by:

Patrick James & Roderick Koehler – June, 2008

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¹⁰ NHTSA's NCAP rating for 2008.

¹¹ North East Region Civil Air Patrol Article dated Aug. 28, 2002.

¹² NHTSA report "12 & 15-passenger Vans Tire Pressure Study: Preliminary Results" dated May, 2005.

¹³ Data received from NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis at a meeting on December 10, 2007.

¹⁴ Study by R.Koehler & P.James - "Preliminary Study of 15-Passenger Van Mileage and Tire Age in Knoxville, Tennessee" dated April, 2008.

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Facts supporting the need for an awareness program and additional NHTSA study and rule making regarding tire “aging”

1. From 1994 through 2004, NHTSA estimates that about 400 fatalities, annually, may be attributed to tire failures of all types ... current data does not specify the number attributed to tire aging alone, but ... NHTSA states “we do know that tire aging is a significant factor in tire related safety”.¹ In a 2008 Consumer Advisory, NHTSA recommends that motorists should follow their vehicle and tire manufacturer’s recommendations concerning replacement of tires due to age. NHTSA goes on to state that “Old tires are also subject to greater stress, which increases the likelihood of catastrophic failure”.²
2. NHTSA has determined that thermo-oxidative degradation (“aging”) of tires is accelerated with higher temperatures and is a contributing factor for tire failures, such as tread separation.³
3. Traditionally, the end of service life of tires is independent of tire age and is defined as the point when the tread wears down to 2/32 inch . However, tires on some vehicles can be in service for many years and yet accumulate very few miles resulting in little or, in the case of full-size spare tires, no wear. NHTSA estimates that 50 percent of light trucks will still be in service after 14 years of age, and 25 percent after 20 years of age. This prompts concerns about the use of full-size spare tires in these vehicles as few owners replace their full-size spare when replacing the in-service tires.⁴
4. In testing actual “aged” tires, NHTSA has found that ... “An evaluation of the tire and rubber material properties in different areas of the tires confirmed that the tire rubber compounds and the materials that bond them experienced thermo-oxidative degradation during service due to their heat and oxygen exposure over time as well as from service related fatigue. The tires experienced a reduction in peel (adhesion) strength between the steel belts, an increase in hardness of most rubber components, a loss of the rubber components’ ability to stretch, increased crack growth rates, and a reduction in cycles to failure in fatigue tests”.⁵
5. NHTSA’s field study showed structural degradation of tires in terms of internal cracks and separations resulting from the tires being used in service. This internal degradation and damage was nearly impossible to detect from a visual inspection alone.⁶
6. Vehicle manufacturers DaimlerChrysler, Ford, VW/Audi and BMW all recommend a maximum six year service life (from date of manufacture) for tires on their vehicles ... including the spare.⁷
7. In a recent study conducted by North Carolina State University, only 4% of those surveyed identified “aging” as a potential tire problem.⁸

¹ NHTSA Research report to Congress on Tire Aging (DOT HS 810 799) dated August 2007.

² NHTSA Consumer Advisory: Motorists Urged to Check Tires Before Summer Trips – dated June 2, 2008.

³ NHTSA Research report to Congress on Tire Aging (DOT HS 810 799) dated August 2007.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

⁸ N.C.State University Dept of Psychology “People Do Not Identify Tire Aging as a Safety Hazard” by Jennifer Cowley, Soyun Kim & Michael Wogalter.

8. Spare tires, tires in storage or on a shelf prior to use, or tires that are infrequently used on trailers or recreational vehicles, run the risk of premature aging and may be unsafe even though they may have sufficient amounts of tread or appear “new”.⁹
9. A study by Kalsher, Wogalter, Lim and Laughery (2005) suggested that a substantial percentage (26%) of people thought that tires could last 10 years or more. This indicates at the very least, some incomplete consumer knowledge about tire aging.¹⁰
10. In the N.C.State study, approximately half (44.9%) of the participants reported that they have not read the owner’s manual for the vehicle they drive. Of those who reported reading the owner’s manual, 63.7% reported that they have read less than 50% of the manual.¹¹
11. According to NHTSA approximately 1% of vehicle fatalities are related to tire issues, while in the case of 15-passenger vans, approximately 11% of fatalities are related to tire issues.¹²
12. Tires, like any other rubber product, have a limited service life regardless of tread depth and use. The dangers of “aged” tires is a little known problem outside of the industry and one that is likely the cause of a significant number of tread separation problems. “Aged” tires are often unsuspectingly put into service after having served as a spare, stored in garages or warehouses, or simply used on a vehicle that is infrequently driven. In many instances these tires show no visible sign of deterioration, and absent any visible indicators, tires with adequate tread depth are likely to be put into service regardless of age.¹³
13. Safety Research & Strategies, Inc has documented 159 incidents in which tires that were six years old or older experienced tread/belt separations. These incidents were the cause of 128 fatalities and 168 serious injuries.¹⁴ In a previous study at least a third of these type of incidents involved “aged” spare tires. In most cases these tires were put into service shortly before the accident.¹⁵
14. According to a 2008 survey of church and university 15-passenger vans in the Knoxville TN area, 40% of the vans surveyed had tires that were six or more years old ... over 20% of the vans surveyed had tires that were ten or more years old.¹⁶ This is likely attributed to the relatively low annual use rate coupled with the belief, by most, that tire life is strictly a function of remaining tread depth.
15. The accident that resulted in the death of Alexis James in July, 2007 was initiated by the failure (tread separation) of the left rear tire on a 1994 15-passenger van. The tire has been shown to be 13 years old and was unwittingly installed by a tire dealership/shop approximately one month prior to the accident. The accident report stated that from the remaining tire remnants, it appeared to be in like new condition. The tire was likely the original spare tire.

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⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Data received from NHTSA’s National Center for Statistics and Analysis at a meeting on December 10, 2007.

¹³ Safety Research & Strategies – “Tires: Aging Dangerously” dated 2006.

¹⁴ Safety Research & Strategies letter to NHTSA Nicole Nason dated June 2, 2008.

¹⁵ Safety Research & Strategies letter to NHTSA Nicole Nason dated December 20, 2006.

¹⁶ Study by R.Koehler & P.James – “Preliminary Study of 15-passenger Van Mileage and Tire Age in Knoxville, Tennessee” – dated April, 2008.

Preliminary Study
of
15-passenger Van
Mileage and Tire Age
in
Knoxville, Tennessee

Prepared by: Roderick Koehler
and
Patrick James
April, 2008

Background

Over the years there have been a number of fatal 15-passenger, single vehicle, rollover accidents which were initiated by a failure of one of the tires. In many cases the tire failure was in the form of either complete or partial tread separation causing the driver to lose control of the vehicle and resulting in a rollover. From 1997 through 2006, there were 534 fatalities of 15-passenger van occupants resulting from 312 single vehicle rollover accidents. Of those, tires were identified as a related factor in 61 of the accidents and 95 of the fatalities.¹

In 2007, NHTSA issued a research report to Congress on tire aging (DOT HS 810 799). In that report, they state that “it is difficult to estimate, based on crash statistics currently available, how many crashes are caused specifically by tire aging. However, we know that tire aging is a significant factor in tire related safety”.² As a matter of fact, several vehicle manufacturers now recommend a maximum six year service life for tires on their vehicles ... including the spare.³

In a recent study conducted by North Carolina State University, only 4% of those surveyed identified “aging” as a potential tire problem.⁴ Indeed, most people identify “tread depth” as the measure of tire life and safety.

Many 15-passenger vans are owned and operated by Churches, Colleges & Universities, Communities Centers, etc. and are not used on a daily or in some cases even a weekly basis. If the annual mileage is low, the possibility exists that the tires could exceed their safe useful life by age in lieu of loss of tread depth.

According to one set of data from R.L.Polk and Company, there were 517,665 15-passenger vans registered nationally in 2006 ... of those, 9,929 were registered in Tennessee.⁵ Additional data from R.L.Polk and Company indicated that, as of July 1, 2006, there were 557,046 15-passenger vans registered in the US.⁶

This study was undertaken to obtain real data on actual mileage of 15-passenger vans and to obtain data on the age of tires installed on those vans.

Data Collection

From mid February, 2008 through early April, 2008 data was collected from a variety of 15-passenger vans in Knoxville, Tennessee. The method was to randomly drive around the Knoxville area in search of 15-passenger vans. Once a van was found there was an attempt to find the owner to distribute van safety information and to obtain permission to record data from the van. In most cases the van VIN number was recorded along with the mileage and the tire manufacturing date from the tire TIN number. This data was then entered into a spreadsheet for analysis and charting.

¹ Notes from Meeting with NHTSA on December 10, 2007

² NHTSA Research Report to Congress on Tire Aging dated August 2007 – page 5

³ NHTSA Research Report to Congress on Tire Aging dated August 2007 – page 34

⁴ N.C.State University Dept of Psychology “People Do Not Identify Tire Aging as a Safety Hazard” by Jennifer Cowley, Soyun Kim & Michael Wogalter.

⁵ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, letter to Roderick Koehler from Adrian Lund, Ph.D. dated March 11, 2008.

⁶ NHTSA, E-mail to Roderick Koehler from Rajesh Subramanian dated March 6, 2008.

Data from three vans involved in fatal accidents not in the Knoxville area were also included in the study. Data for two of those vans was obtained from a NTSB Accident Report (NTSB/HAR-03/03) ... "15-Passenger Van Single-Vehicle Rollover Accidents, Henrietta, Texas, May 8, 2001, and Randleman, North Carolina, July 1, 2001". Data for the third van was obtained from the accident report for the 15-passenger van, single vehicle accident that occurred near Columbia, South Carolina that resulted in the death of Alexis James on July 17, 2007.

Data was collected for a total of thirty two 15-passenger vans.

Findings

The distribution of the ages of the vans included in this study are very similar to the overall national average. Thus, a case might be made that the actual data collected may be representative of all 15-passenger vans in the US.

Model Year	Knoxville Study		National	
	Number	% Total	Number	% Total
1993 and older	8	25.0%	165,643	30%
1994-1998	8	25.0%	170,822	31%
1999-2003	10	31.3%	196,857	35%
2004 & newer	6	18.8%	23,724	4%
Total	32	100.0%	557,046	100%

The average age of the vans in this study is 10.5 years vs. a national average of 12.5 years as of 2006.⁷

Tire ages were recorded for 30 of the vans as follows ...

Tire Age	No. Vans	% Total
1-2 yrs	7	23.3%
3-4 yrs	5	16.7%
5-6 yrs	7	23.3%
7-8 yrs	4	13.3%
9-10 yrs	2	6.7%
10+ yrs	5	16.7%
Total	30	100.0%

40% of the vans had tires that were six or more years old. Over 30% of the vans had tires that were eight or more years old while over 20% of the vans had tires that were over ten years old.

Looking at only the vans that are 10+ years old, approximately 60% of these had tires that were eight or more years old while approximately 46% had tires that were ten or more years old.

Mileage was recorded for 28 of the vans. The estimated annual mileage was calculated by dividing the total mileage by the van's age in years based on the model year.

Annual Mileage	
Overall Average	6644
Maximum Average	16250
Minimum Average	2125
Median Average	6353

⁷ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, letter to Roderick Koehler from Adrian Lund, Ph.D. dated March 11, 2008.

Conclusions

1. Based on the data collected approximately 23% of all 15-passenger vans have tires that are ten or more years old. According to the NHTSA research report on tire aging, ten years is the maximum service life recommended by the tire manufacturers.⁸ Applying this to the total number of 15-passenger vans registered in the US, it can be estimated that approximately 110,000 to 120,000 of the 15-passenger vans on the road today might have tires that are ten years old or older ... this is considered beyond the maximum safe service life by the tire manufacturers and thus at risk of failure by aging.

2. Several of the documented single rollover accidents that occurred in the southern states involved tires that were eight or more years old. It is believed that the higher temperatures in the southern states accelerate the tire aging process.⁹ Southern states, including Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and California, had a total of 188,000 15-passenger vans registered in 2006.¹⁰ The data collected in this study showed that approximately 33% of all the vans had tires that were eight or more years old. Based on this it can be estimated that approximately 60,000 of all the 15-passenger vans in the southern states listed might have tires that are at possible risk of failure due to aging.

3. The data collected indicates that the general public who own and operate these vans are unaware of the dangers of aged tires. The vast majority believe that safe tire life is based only on tread depth. Thus tires are in service until the tread depth reaches the recommended minimum or until severe cracking or other visible deterioration is evident. The data collected indicated that on average these vans are driven approximately 6,600 miles per year. This is less than half the national average for all passenger vehicles. Most OEM tires have a tread life of at least 60,000 to 70,000 miles. Thus if one only looks at tread depth, it is easy to see that even well meaning, observant van operators could keep tires on their vans for over ten years.

4. Considering the estimated 15-passenger van average mileage driven per year ,, the number of 15-passenger vans registered ... and the number of 15-passenger van occupant fatalities per year, one can calculate the 15-passenger van fatality rate per 100M VMD.

This table shows the results of that calculation for the years 2005 and 2006 and compares those number with the actual numbers for all passenger vehicles for the same two years.

	2005	2006
Estimated 15-passenger van 100M VMD/yr	33	34
15-passenger van occupant fatalities/yr	99	58
15-passenger fatalities per 100M VMD	2.98	1.69
All passenger vehicles fatalities per 100M VMD	1.45	1.41
15-passenger fatalities vs. all passenger vehicles	105%	20%

This indicates that even though the fatality rate for 15-passenger vans has declined significantly, it is still 20% higher than the national average for all passenger vehicles. Thus the 15-passenger vans can still be considered one of the most deadly vehicles on the road today.

⁸ NHTSA Research Report to Congress on Tire Aging dated August 2007 – page 33

⁹ Id

¹⁰ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, letter to Roderick Koehler from Adrian Lund, Ph.D. dated March 11, 2008

Recommendations

1. Request NHTSA to conduct a nationwide survey to confirm or perhaps to dispute the data collected in this report in the Knoxville area.

2. Based on the outcome of that nationwide survey, request NHTSA to issue an alert to all owners/operators of 15-passenger vans regarding the dangers of tire aging ... include instructions as to how to determine tire age and recommendations for maximum service life.

3. Continue to encourage NHTSA to improve the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards and to continue to extend those standards to 15-passenger vans.

4. Continue to distribute the attached 15-passenger vans Safety Guidelines to the owners and operators of the vans ... and encourage compliance with the Safety Guidelines.

15-Passenger Van Safety Guidelines

1. When a 15-passenger van is not full, passengers are to sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.
2. Never allow more than 15 people to ride in a 15-passenger van.
3. Require all passengers and the driver to wear proper safety restraints (seat belts - preferably 3-point lap/shoulder belts) any time the van is in motion. Inspect seat belts regularly ... replace any missing, broken or damaged belts and/or buckles.
4. Inspect the tires, including the spare ... determine the date of manufacture of each tire from the DOT code (may only be on the inboard sidewall). The DOT code will end with either 3 numbers or 4 numbers ... if three numbers, the tire was manufactured in the 90's. the last number is the year and the first two are the week in that year ... example "168" would be the 16th week of 1998. If four numbers, the tire was manufactured in 2000 or later ... the first two numbers are the week and the last two numbers are the year ... example "2303" would be the 23rd week of 2003.
5. Replace all tires that are more than six years old. It is critical to remember that low mileage doesn't mean tires are safe. Tires deteriorate with time whether they are used or not ... And, unfortunately, dangerously deteriorated tires cannot always be detected by visual inspection alone. When buying new tires be sure to get the date of manufacture of each tire. If they are more than a year old, do not buy them. Remember they have a six year life from the date of manufacture not from the date they are installed on your van.
6. Be sure all tires are the proper size and load rating for the van. Recommended tire size and load rating should be in the owner's manual.
7. Inspect the tires before each use. Examine tires for uneven wear, cracks, and other damage. Replace any damaged tires.
8. Check tire pressure before each use. Beware ! ... required front and back tire pressures may be very different and are likely higher than required for car tires ... typically van tires must be inflated to 50 lbs. for the front tires and 80 lbs. in the rear tires. The manufacturer's recommended pressure is usually provided on the driver's doorsill or in the owner's manual.
9. Do not overload the van. See the owner's manual for maximum allowable total weight of passengers and cargo.
10. Do not strap any cargo onto the roof or back of the van.
11. Do not tow anything behind the van.
12. Be certain the driver has a valid driver's license for the state where they reside (a commercial driver's license is preferred). Be aware that van drivers need additional training since these vans handle differently than other vehicles, especially when fully loaded. Allow no one under the age of 21 to drive the van. Select one or two drivers to drive the van on a regular basis. Insist that a new driver get experience driving the van alone before driving with others in the van. Remember a 15-passenger van is substantially longer and wider than a car, thus it ...
 - Requires more space and additional reliance on the side-view mirrors for changing lanes.
 - Does not respond as well to abrupt steering maneuvers ... such as might occur with a blowout or dropping off the edge of the pavement.

- Requires additional braking time.
13. Limit drive time to 8 hours per driver per 24 hours. Ban driving from midnight to 6 a.m. ... the van is dangerous enough without fatigue and poor visibility.
 14. Be absolutely certain the driver is not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 15. The driver is to be well rested and attentive to driving. Prohibit use of a cell phone by the driver while the van is in motion. Limit conversation with other passengers.
 16. Drive at a safe speed based on driving conditions ... never more than the speed limit ... and with a maximum of 60 mph regardless of the conditions and speed limit. Always slow down if the roads are wet or icy.
 17. Keep the gas tank as full as practically possible. A full tank of gas lowers the center of gravity and reduces the risk of rollover.
 18. Remove the last row of seating. Do not stow cargo in the van any higher than the bench level of the seats.

American Center for Van and Tire Safety

June 2008

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Data Collected

<u>date</u>	<u>location</u>	<u>make</u>	<u>Model</u>	<u>year</u>	<u>mileage</u>	<u>mfg date</u> <u>tires</u>	<u>tire age - yrs</u>
2/20/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 250 Royal SE	1984	51,000	358	10
2/20/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	2002	13,000	4607	1
2/20/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram (15- passenger)	1986	95,200	367	11
2/20/2008	Church	Dodge	350 Royal	1986	69,637	3004	4
2/21/2008	Church	Ford	350	2000	38,189	0503	5
2/21/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	1996	100,000	0707	1
2/21/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram E350 XL	1985	132,000	???	
2/21/2008	Church	Ford	SuperDuty	1999	77,760	1604	4
2/21/2008	Church	Chevrolet	Express	2005	10,000	4304	4
2/21/2008	Church	Chevrolet	Express	2002	55,000	4301	7
2/21/2008	Church	Ford	Club Wagon	1996	104,000	1603	5
9/6/2006	Individual	Dodge	Ram (15- passenger)	1994	60,137	183	14
5/8/2001	Church	Dodge	Ram 350 Maxi	1993	44,156	???	8
7/1/2001	Church	Dodge	Ram Maxi	1989	74,465	???	8
3/14/2008	Church	Ford	Club Wagon XLT	1994	110,282	208	10
3/14/2008	Church	Dodge	RAM LE	1994	105,209	4703	5
3/14/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	1997	74,644	4703	5
3/14/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	1997	28,948	107	11
4/2/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	2001	???	1506	2
4/2/2008	Church	Ford	E-350	2006	???	4404	4
4/2/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	1989	81,451	227	11
4/2/2008	Church	Dodge	Ram 3500	2000	???	509	8
4/2/2008	Church	Ford		1990	87,520	415	13
4/2/2008	Church	Ford		1998	???	1002	6
4/4/2008	University	Dodge	Ram 3500	2002	50,484	0406	2
4/4/2008	University	Dodge	Ram 3500	2002	48,600	???	
4/4/2008	University	Dodge	Ram 3500	2002	39,000	3207	1
4/4/2008	University	Dodge	Ram 3500 (12 pass)	2000	47,000	1406 & 2406	2
4/4/2008	University	Ford	E-350 (12 pass)	2004	46,000	1507	1
4/4/2008	University	Ford	E-350 (12 pass)	2004	37,000	5003	5
4/4/2008	University	Ford	E-350 (12 pass)	2004	36,000	3105	3
4/4/2008	University	Ford	E-350 (12 pass)	2004	65,000	5103	5

Some Recent 15-Passenger Van Rollover Accidents

June 30, 2008 – Pleasanton, TX

A church van traveling on the interstate with 11 occupants including teenagers ... The left rear tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled over ... one teenager not wearing a seat belt was ejected ... nine people were injured and sent to the emergency room ... no fatalities.

June 23, 2008 – San Antonio, TX

A 15-passenger van on the interstate with 15 family members going on vacation ... A rear tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled over ... all taken to the hospital ... two fatalities including a 15 year old boy ... the other 13 suffered non-fatal injuries.

June 14, 2008 – Boardman, OR

A 15-passenger van on the interstate with 15 farm workers plus the driver ... none were wearing seat belts ... The left rear tire failed (tread separation) ... the van went out of control and rolled over ... all taken to the hospital ... three were critically injured ... no fatalities.

May 23, 2008 – Louisville, KY

A church van traveling on the interstate ... The left rear tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled several times ... five elderly women sent to the hospital with injuries ... one was ejected ... no fatalities.

February 24, 2008 – Ocala, FL

A church van traveling on the interstate ... van went out of control and rolled ... cause not reported ... 12 occupants taken to the hospital ... no fatalities.

February 17, 2008 – North Mankato, MN

A church van traveling on the interstate ... high winds cause the van veer off the road ... van went out of control and rolled over ... only minor injuries reported ... all (eight students and two adult leaders) were wearing seatbelts ... no fatalities.

January 12, 2008 – Hanover, NH

A 12-passenger van on the interstate ... van veered off the pavement ... van went out of control and rolled several times ... nine girls sent to the hospital ... they were all members of a collegiate track team ... three sustained serious injuries, including spinal cord, neck and internal injuries ... all were reportedly wearing seatbelts ... no fatalities.

January 18, 2008 – Onawa, IA

A college van on the interstate towing a trailer ... driver attempts to take evasive action to miss a slowing or stopped car ... van skids ... trailer jackknifes ... van goes out of control and rolls ... van was carrying ten members of a college wrestling team and their two coaches ... one wrestler was partially ejected and killed ... he was not wearing a seatbelt ... all other occupants were wearing seatbelts and received only minor injuries.

January 15, 2008 – Phil Campbell, AL

A van transporting workers to place of employment ... the van was traveling on a state road ... van goes out of control and rolls ... eight injured and taken to the hospital ... one person ejected and killed.

January 12, 2008 – Bathurst, New Brunswick

A van transporting members of a boys high school basketball team ... Van was traveling on a two-lane highway ... road was likely somewhat snow covered and slick ... driver lost control ... van skidded into incoming traffic and was hit broadside by a tractor-trailer truck ... seven students and one adult were killed.

January 12, 2008 – Hartford, CT

A 15-passenger van traveling on the interstate ... van veered off the pavement, went out of control and rolled ... cause not reported ... nine occupants injured and hospitalized ... no fatalities.

December 27, 2007 – Prince George, British Columbia

A 15-passenger van with 11 occupants traveling on the highway ... van attempts to pass a vehicle ... goes off edge of pavement, goes out of control and rolls ... all eleven occupants received minor injuries ... no fatalities..

December 1, 2007 – Wingate, IN

A college van carrying members of a hockey team traveling on a state highway ... slick roads with rain and sleet ... van slides, goes out of control and rolls over ... one student is killed and seven are injured.

November 8, 2007 – Round Rock, TX

A church van traveling on the interstate ... van went out of control and rolled ... cause not reported ... three occupants ... two were killed and one was injured.

October 24, 2007 – Alto Bonito, TX

An adult day care van carrying 10 passengers traveling on a U.S. Highway ... van strikes a car that had pulled out of a side road ... van goes out of control and rolls ... seven killed ... three were ejected ... at least four of the seven killed were not wearing seat belts.

October 21, 2007 – Muncie, IN

A church van traveling on the interstate ... The left rear tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled several times ... five killed including two adults and three children ... eleven injured ... four of the five killed were ejected from the van ...

September 11, 2007 – Bishopville, SC

A church van traveling on the interstate ... The left rear tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled several times ... van was carrying 16 people ... one killed and others injured ... several were ejected.

July 17, 2007 – Columbia, SC

A former church van carrying members of a youth girls softball team to a tournament ... van was traveling on the interstate ... left rear tire fails ... van goes out of control and rolls ... two adults and two children sustain injuries ... one ten year old is ejected and killed. All were reportedly wearing seat belts.

June 29, 2007 – Daytona Beach, FL

A church-affiliated day-care van was traveling on a county road ... pavement was wet ... van slid off the edge of the road, went out of control and rolled ... ten children injured and one six year old child killed.

April 29, 2007 – Lincoln, NE

A church van traveling on the interstate ... The left rear tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled several times ... 18 students and 2 adults were riding in the van ... all were hospitalized, three in critical condition ... no fatalities.

November 25, 2006 – Fort Worth, TX

A church van traveling on the interstate ... a tire failed ... the van went out of control and rolled several times ... two adults and eight children injured ... no fatalities.

American Center for Van and Tire Safety

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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Our Mission. Save lives. prevent injuries. reduce vehicle-related crashes



For Immediate Release
Monday, June 2, 2008

Contact: Rae Tyson
Telephone: (202) 366-9550

CONSUMER ADVISORY: Motorists Urged to Check Tires Before Summer Trips

The risk of a serious crash during hot weather can be heightened by tires that are worn out, under-inflated or too old, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said today.

To reduce the risk of a crash, NHTSA Administrator Nicole Nason urged motorists to have tires, including the spare, checked before embarking on a vacation journey.

"Protecting you and your family should be your top priority," said Administrator Nason. "Getting your tires checked will significantly reduce the likelihood of a tire-related crash."

NHTSA research shows that hot weather – and overloaded vehicles – can add significant stress to a tire, especially if it is not properly inflated. Old tires also are subject to greater stress, which increases the likelihood of catastrophic failure.

While tire condition is important for all vehicles, it is especially critical for those more prone to rollover when tires fail. That would include sport utility vehicles (SUVs), pickups or other vehicles with a higher center of gravity.

Consumers can check tire inflation with an inexpensive gauge, using the vehicle manufacturers' recommended pressures, which are found on the driver's side door pillar or in the owner's manual.

The age of the tire can be determined by checking the identification number on the sidewall that begins with the letters "DOT". The last four digits represent the week and year the tire was manufactured.

Some tire and vehicle manufacturers have issued recommendations for replacing tires that range from six to ten years of age. Consumers are advised to check with their tire or vehicle manufacturer for specific guidance.

"Remember that it is vitally important to check your spare tire too," said Administrator Nason. "Your spare can be a real safety hazard if it is old or under-inflated."

For more information on proper tire care, along with NHTSA's tire rating guide, visit www.safercar.gov.



National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Our Mission. Save lives, prevent injuries, reduce vehicle-related crashes



Close
Window

NHTSA 04-08
Monday, May 12, 2008

Contact: Rae Tyson
Telephone: (202) 366-9590

Nation's Top Vehicle Safety Official Urges 15-Passenger Van Users to Drive with Caution this Summer

New research from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has found June through August to be the deadliest time of year for 15-passenger van occupants, due to rollover crashes. Statistics show that 31 percent of fatal rollovers involving 15-passenger vans occur during the busy summer travel months.

NHTSA Administrator Nicole R. Nason is urging all 15-passenger van users to take appropriate safety precautions when taking to the road during this busy travel season.

"The last thing we want is a summer outing to turn into a tragic memory," Nason said.

NHTSA data shows a significant increase in rollover risk when the van is fully loaded with drivers and passengers. In 2006, 50 percent of occupant fatalities that occurred were in vans that were fully loaded. Fifty-nine percent of those killed were unbelted.

Other factors that contribute to rollover incidents include improperly inflated tires, poor tire condition and inexperienced drivers. Owners should follow manufacturers' recommendations for replacing old tires because tires may become less safe after a certain period of time, even if they have adequate tread and proper inflation.

"For a safe trip buckle up, check the tire pressure and make sure an experienced driver is behind the wheel before heading out on the roads this summer," said Nason.

Overall statistics show the number of deaths in 15-passenger van rollover crashes has been declining steadily since 2001. However, these vehicles still pose a safety risk to occupants, claiming the lives of 58 people in accidents in 2006.

To view the report click here: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810947.PDF>

For more information about 15-passenger van safety visit www.safercar.gov

American Center for Van and Tire Safety

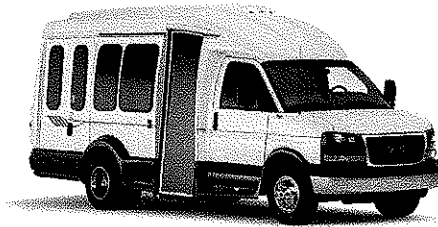
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Options to improve the safety of 15-passenger vans

1. The best and safest option of all is to get a small bus that will meet all federal bus safety standards in lieu of a 15-passenger van. A number of manufacturers offer these vans such as the one pictured here.

These vans are currently available from a number of manufacturers and have a cost from the mid-\$40K. Cost depends on size and options selected.



2. The next best option is to add dual wheels to an existing 15-passenger such as pictured below. With this option tire redundancy is added so the risk of loss of control if a rear tire fails is reduced. It also reduces the load per rear tire by half.



An additional advantage of this option is the added weight of the two additional tires. The wheels and related parts lower the center of gravity of the vehicle by approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ " ... This may not sound like a lot but considering the lower center of gravity and

the increase in the track width of the rear tires, the risk of rollover, as determined by NHTSA's new car assessment risk model, is reduced by about 10 percentage points ... With this change, it's estimated that the nominal baseline risk of rollover is lowered from approximately 30% to approximately 20%.



This modification is available at a number of service garages around the country. Cost of this conversion, including seven new tires (6 in service & 1 spare) is in the \$3,000 to \$4,000 range.

3. If it is not possible to replace your 15-passenger van with a small bus ... or if funds are not available to convert your 15-passenger van to dual rear wheels ... at a minimum, diligently follow the safety guidelines as issued by American Center for Van and Tire Safety ... Just following these guidelines will reduce the number of single vehicle rollover accidents and thus reduce the number of related fatalities. Had these guidelines been in place, the accident that caused Alexis James to lose her life might never have happened.

To: Whom It May Concern

Alexis, as a first grader possessed spunkiness like no other student I have taught. She was curious, always asking why. She wanted to know more than the lesson entailed. Humor was a part of her, making her classmates laugh and feel at ease around her. As a result, she had many friends. Alexis was high-spirited. Her excitement for learning and for having fun was contagious. Peers were often swayed by her enthusiasm and joined into class activities more easily because of Alexis' exuberance.

Alexis, as a big sister to her brother Austin, nurtured with compassion and encouragement. Austin was a first grader and Alexis often checked on him to see if he was ok. It became an everyday occurrence for her to check to see if Austin had a good day behaviorally. If he had stayed on 'green', she tossed him a water bottle. His eyes would light-up as if she had given him the greatest gift ever. If he was not on 'green', she gave him a quick hug and whispered, "do better tomorrow." Alexis took the role of big sister seriously.

Alexis will be missed by teachers, friends, and family. Those whose lives might have crossed paths with Alexis will miss out on getting to know a beautiful girl, both physically and spiritually.

Respectfully submitted,



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