

# 15-Passenger Van Outreach Plan

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## BACKGROUND

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) published an action plan for 15-passenger van safety in 2003 that described research programs, consumer information activities, and regulatory actions intended to address the safety of 15-passenger van users. The plan was updated in 2004, and since then the agency has completed the majority of planned projects. The remaining actions include rulemakings to improve roof crush resistance and mitigate occupant ejections; updating 15-passenger van crash fatality research; and ongoing consumer information activities.

Since 2004, NHTSA completed five major rulemakings that improve on the safety of 15-passenger vans. As of 2005, Federal law prohibits the use of 15-passenger vans for the school-related transport of high school age and younger students and since model year 2006, NHTSA has included 15-passenger vans in its New Car Assessment Program rollover testing. In addition, the action plan was updated again in April 2008 and reported on progress since the 2004 update.

Moving forward, NHTSA is committed to conducting ongoing consumer education to address 15-passenger van safety through a sustained public education campaign.

## THE PROBLEM

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

A number of safety issues exist that are specific to the use of 12- and 15-passenger vans. These issues primarily affect the estimated 550,000 vans currently on the road, many of which do not have the new safety features required on newer vehicles. These issues are outlined below:

- They have a higher rate of rollover under certain conditions.
- *Maintenance.* Fatal rollovers of 15-passenger vans are most likely to involve tire failure, since excessively worn or improperly inflated tires can lead to a loss of vehicle control and ultimately a rollover.
- Driver experience is essential to safely operating these vehicles (a commercial driver's license is preferred).
- *Belt use.* An unrestrained 15-passenger van occupant involved in a single-vehicle crash is about three times as likely to be killed as a restrained occupant.

## TARGET AUDIENCES

The campaign has been targeting 15-passenger van users by working to distribute safety information through organizations or umbrella groups that reach or have an impact on these van drivers. In addition, NHTSA can use a targeted earned media campaign to reach select, hard-to-reach audiences.

The key to the campaign is to continue to effectively distribute safety material to target audiences to educate their drivers on van safety facts. The following categories capture the majority of audience segments to reach out to, though further research and investigation may reveal additional audiences to explore. It will be essential to work with these audiences and outlined partner groups to ensure their drivers or owners are adequately informed. In addition, the use of Claritas/MRI data/market research will further determine areas of the country to concentrate efforts to reach van owners and drivers.

- State departments of motor vehicles
- Churches and religious groups
- Colleges and universities
- School systems
- Daycare facilities and Head Start programs
- Community groups
- YMCA and summer camp organizations
- Military branches
- Fleet owners
- Rental van companies
- Veterans Affairs medical centers
- Migrant workers, primarily in the southwest
- Manufacturers
- Independent owners

Due to the different nature of these types of groups, different tactics must be used to reach them. Some audiences may not be Internet-dependent and others are likely more sophisticated in their ability to seek out information. There will be a heavy focus on outreach to regions in the southeastern and southwestern States, due to the link between higher temperatures and accelerated tire aging.

### ***Independent Owners***

Outlined below are steps that NHTSA may take to get safety information directly to independent owners of older vans:

- Determine a cost-effective way to gather VIN numbers of all 15-passenger vans on the road; and
- If VIN numbers are gathered, NHTSA plans to work with AAMVA and DMVs nationwide to send owners safety information. Some States may not be able to facilitate this request, but those that are able to help will be identified.

### **TARGETED CAMPAIGN**

The following outreach plan details ways to further promote the safety messages related to 15-passenger vans. Communications activities will seek to effectively and efficiently push out key safety messages to target audiences that have been determined to be drivers, fleet owners, or independent drivers of 15-passenger vans. To execute the ongoing consumer information and education of 15-passenger van safety, NHTSA will reach out to all audiences outlined above to determine the best way to communicate with them using the elements outlined below.

Primarily, current partners will be contacted to make sure they have updated safety information and are distributing it to their members or those tasked with driving 15-passenger vans for the organization. There are additional partner targets that NHTSA will begin working with over the coming months to distribute safety information.

The campaign messages and material will primarily be targeted to two separate factions, one highlighting issues pertaining to older vans currently on the road and the other to getting safety information to buyers and owners of new vans. As further outreach begins with partners, the agency anticipates that each target group or partner may own a mix of vehicles both new and old. Working one-on-one with each group will determine the best material and messages for the drivers of their fleets.

### ***Materials Development***

In addition to the updated 15-passenger van consumer brochure, NHTSA may also design additional material for partners as their participation is secured. As these publications are developed, they will retain a look and feel that is consistent and recognizable as part of the Safercar.gov brand. Just as messaging needs to be consistent, material will include safety information that is easy to read and understand. Flyers, posters and brochures will be produced in English and Spanish versions, with additional languages potentially available online.

NHTSA is distributing the material outlined below to these audiences through current partners and additional target partners.

#### **Brochure**

The 15-passenger van consumer brochure has been updated and is available online for consumers to download.

- Hard-copy brochures will be sent to the current list of people and groups who have requested them from NHTSA.
- NHTSA will also work with current and targeted partners to get the brochures to consumers through their channels; this will include both owners and drivers of new and older vans.
- Hard-copy brochures will also be used for NHTSA's presence at events, conferences, and trade shows.
- Other languages -- a Spanish language version of all material will be developed and based on demographic information, other languages will be considered for translation.

#### **Fact Sheet**

A one-page fact sheet is in development and will outline top safety points for easy consumption. It will also be made available online so it can be easily shared with partners or hosted on other Web sites.

#### **HTML**

An HTML e-mail is in the works that will have useful facts and will also drive readers back to the 15-passenger van Web site for more information and to download publications.

#### **Instructional Video**

A student or driver instructional video that can be distributed electronically to target organizations and housed on their Web sites may be developed. This would be an excellent way to help educate drivers before they get behind the wheel.

- Burn these videos to CDs and distribute them as educational collateral to partners and target audiences.
- Work with AAMVA to have the CDs distributed to target owners.

#### ***Events***

NHTSA will continue to use speaking opportunities at select events across the country to promote messages related to 15-passenger van safety and distribute publications to event attendees.

#### ***Partnerships***

Identifying, prioritizing, and reaching out to third-party partners to educate them about 15-passenger van safety is the essential element of promoting safety messages to the widest audience. This effort includes giving partners the tools they need to push safety information out to their constituents, members, and drivers, thus extending the reach of these safety messages and augmenting public awareness of 15-passenger van safety issues.

NHTSA will work with partners and allies to amplify campaign messages and help distribute those messages to a broader audience. These third-party relationships also build credibility and

awareness among the media, which in turn helps expand reach. NHTSA already has a base of partners with which it has worked to distribute various safety material and messaging over the past several years. That foundation will continue to be built upon by re-energizing efforts with previous third-party allies and recruiting additional partners to promote messages.

Distributing the information currently created for 15-passenger van outreach to target partners is the best way to effectively spread the safety messages. As NHTSA continues to communicate with partners and target partners, the best ways to work with these organizations to distribute material, post relevant material to Web sites, or further leverage digital communications will be determined. It is likely that universities and schools will be better able to work with NHTSA to distribute information online or create special Web sections focused on this topic. More-traditional partners such as churches and community groups will most likely need to distribute information through their traditional means.

In addition, our partners will receive HTML e-mails that offer an opportunity to develop a co-branded e-mail to distribute to members or target audiences to raise awareness of safety issues. The e-mail will encourage members to click on embedded links that will allow them to download publications and link back to the 15-passenger van safety Web site.

#### **Current Partners**

Current partners listed below are being contacted to educate them about this safety issue. Work will be done over the coming months to make sure they have the safety material necessary to distribute to their members and constituents. In addition, the updated brochure and fact sheet will be transmitted electronically to encourage them to post items on their Web sites. NHTSA will encourage these partners to link to the 15-passenger van Web site for additional information.

As NHTSA further discusses this safety issue with the partners below, additional ways to disseminate safety messages will be determined.

- National Collegiate Athletic Association
- Umbrella church and youth organizations
- National Automobile Dealers Association
- YMCA and YWCA
- Governors Highway Safety Association
- AAA
- American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators

### **AAMVA**

Specifically, NHTSA will explore with AAMVA the possibility of pulling VIN numbers through State DMVs if a unique identifier exists. If so, NHTSA will work with State DMVs to distribute safety material to current owners. In addition, NHTSA will work with AAMVA to determine if distributing brochures or material in target DMVs is possible.

### **Additional Partner Targets**

Below are additional target partners, some that NHTSA has already contacted and others that are target for contact, to determine their willingness and ability to distribute information and communicate messages related to the issue. These groups have been identified based on their memberships and the likelihood that they are users or owners of 15-passenger vans.

NHTSA will work with all organizations to determine the best ways to disseminate information and work with them to communicate effectively about the safety issues associated with 15-passenger vans. The distribution of brochures, educational CDs and other material will occur in addition to making sure safety information is featured on their Web sites and they link to [Safercar.gov](http://Safercar.gov).

NHTSA will continue to research other organizations that can help communicate safety issues to our target audiences.

- **The National Association of Church Business Administration**  
This group is a national, interdenominational, professional Christian organization.
- **National Council of Churches USA**  
The NCC's member faith groups — from a spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African-American and Living Peace churches — include 45 million people in more than 100,000 local congregations in communities across the Nation.
- **The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America**  
The ELCA has nearly 10,500 congregations across the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, and nearly 5 million members.
- **The Evangelical Free Church of America**  
The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of some 1,300 autonomous churches across the United States. The ministry of the EFCA currently extends to some 45 countries of the world.
- **The United Methodist Church**  
The United Methodist Church is one of the most carefully organized and largest denominations in the world.

- **The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**  
With denominational offices in Louisville, Kentucky, the church has approximately 2.3 million members, more than 10,000 congregations, and 14,000 ordained and active ministers.
- **The Catholic Church of America**  
The Catholic Church and its various community groups is an important resource to educate regarding the safety issues with 15-passenger vans. Through research NHTSA did not identify one umbrella organization that covers all Catholic churches in America, but selected a few principal organizations that together have a deep reach into Catholic communities across the Nation. NHTSA plans to work with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Health Association of the United States, and Catholic Charities of America to disseminate relevant vehicle safety information.
- **United Jewish Communities**  
The Jewish Federation, now known as United Jewish Communities, represents 155 Jewish federations and 400 independent communities across North America. NHTSA plans to contact Human Services and Social Policy in Government Affairs to discuss distributing safety material through the community.
- **Focus on the Family**  
NHTSA will work with this organization to distribute safety information through its channels.
- **The National After School Association**  
This association represents the voice of the after-school field and current issues affecting children and youth in their out-of-school time. This group would provide access to those who operate 15-passenger vans in an after-school setting.
- **The Assisted Living Federation of America**  
This is the largest national association dedicated to professionally operated assisted living communities for older people. It also has a network of State affiliates, and part of its mission is “operational excellence” in community systems, infrastructure, and activities.
- **The National Association of Community Health Service**  
This group is made up of more than 1,150 community health center organizations that provide vital primary care to more than 17 million people of limited financial resources.
- **JCCs of North America**  
This is the continental umbrella organization for the Jewish Community Center Movement, which includes more than 350 JCCs, YM-YWHAs, and camp sites in the United States. JCCs often run day schools and day camps and are also usually engaged with local senior community.

- **The Driving School Association of the Americas**  
 This is the largest association of driving school owners in the world, serving 8,000 professional driving schools and 50,000 driving educators. Its mission revolves around driver education and traffic safety. There were several inquiries on the NHTSA material request list from driving schools.
- **American Car Rental Association**  
 This organization is made up of groups that own and rent 15-passenger vans to consumers and other groups.
- **Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education**  
 This association has more than 11,000 members at 1,400 campuses, and members serve a variety of functions and roles, including the vice president and dean for student life as well as professionals working within housing and residence life, student unions, and student activities, among others.
- **National Association of Independent Colleges and University State Executives**  
 This organization is composed of the leaders of State associations representing independent colleges and universities. It is part of an umbrella organization, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.
- **National Association of College Auxiliary Services**  
 This organization is represented at over 857 U.S. campuses. It counts student transportation and travel as one of its core focuses. NACAS embraces key values such as focusing on operational quality and identification of best practices in professional service areas.
- **Manufacturers**  
 NHTSA has begun outreach to select OEMs to gauge their interest in including information regarding 15-passenger van safety. The best way to secure their participation is to produce material for them and ask them to provide material to new van purchasers. NHTSA will also work with them to pull the VIN numbers of 15-passenger vans so those numbers can be used to track current owners through DMVs.
- **Tire Industry Association**  
 The Tire Industry Association is an international association representing all segments of the tire industry, including those that manufacture, repair, recycle, sell, service, or use new or retreaded tires, and also those suppliers or individuals who furnish equipment, material, or services to the industry. Through the TIA, NHTSA may reach out to independent tire dealers to distribute specific safety information regarding safety issues related to 15-passenger vans.
- **Rubber Manufacturers Association**  
 NHTSA has contacted the Rubber Manufacturers Association to distribute specific safety information regarding safety issues related to 15-passenger vans during the association's "Tire Safety Month" in June. Preliminary discussions of how to best communicate with target audiences has begun.

- **Insurance Companies**  
NHTSA has communicated with insurance companies to gauge their interest in distributing safety information. Many insurance companies work with other industry-funded groups to distribute safety information. NHTSA believes through its past experience this may be a harder group to penetrate.
- **Costco, Sam's Club, BJ's, Military Commissaries, etc.**  
NHTSA will work with these companies to gauge interest and the ability to have safety material available in their stores at checkout areas or public information areas. NHTSA has identified these stores as places where owners and drivers of 15-passenger vans frequent.
- **AAA**  
NHTSA is currently working with AAA to determine ways to penetrate its membership with relevant safety messages. The safety of 15-passenger vans will be a part of the messages to its members.

### ***Earned Media***

A credible way of reaching a large segment of the population would be to execute a multi-faceted earned media campaign. This would include coverage by newspapers, radio, college newspapers and radio stations, community organization newsletters, and select Web sites that would feature safety information on 15-passenger vans. Working with Patrick James, founder of the American Center for Van and Tire Safety, as a spokesperson could add to the effectiveness and credibility of this issue and help generate media coverage.

Consumers value and trust information from the Federal Government, and moreover, consumer and automotive reporters are continually looking for story ideas, generating auto-safety stories on their own, and seeking credible sources to assist their reporting. Following are tools and tactics that can drive media coverage and further disseminate safety messages.

NHTSA can use Claritas/MRI data/market research to further target regions to focus press outreach.

#### **Press Releases and Advisories**

Continue to issue consumer advisories through the media to reinforce the safety risks of 15-passenger vans.

#### **Matte Release**

Develop a pre-packaged story that outlines the safety issues related to 15-passenger vans and distribute as a matte release throughout the country. This could be a good way to reach local communities and target audiences.

#### **Desk-Side Visits**

Schedule one-on-one meetings with high-level journalists who cover vehicle safety to discuss issues related to 15-passenger vans.

### **Radio Media Tour**

Use targeted spokespeople to highlight safety issues, build a radio media tour, and set up interviews with national networks, nationally syndicated shows, statewide radio networks, regional radio networks, and local radio stations in the country's top markets.

### **Regional Media Tours**

Use targeted spokespeople, schedule regional media tours in target markets to discuss issues related to 15-passenger van safety. These could take place in regions most affected by safety issues or where the highest concentrations of van users reside.

- An example of this would be to schedule media interviews with select Hispanic outlets that cover the southwest in order to reach migrant workers.

### **Audio News Release**

An audio news release maximizes exposure, and can be taped by a NHTSA spokesperson and distributed to stations across the country. This is an easy way to disseminate the message while at the same time having complete control over the story.

- The release can be targeted to a certain time period like "back to school" in September or "safe summer driving" to be released around Memorial Day.
- NHTSA can target traffic reporters or police officers who use traffic safety scripts to further distribute this information.

### **Partner With Key Organizations**

Use key partners as spokespeople to help distribute safety messages. This could include working with a spokesperson at AAMVA or asking Patrick James to be a spokesman to communicate these issues.

### **New Media**

- Facilitate guest posts by NHTSA officials on partner Web sites such as AAMVA and Edmunds.
- Secure NHTSA spokespeople to participate in targeted online live chats through relevant sites, such as Edmunds and Kelley Blue Book, or popular media sites like The Car Connection or Auto Blog.

### **WEB SITE**

The existing 15-passenger van Web site at [WWW.SAFERCAR.GOV](http://WWW.SAFERCAR.GOV) is a vital tool in NHTSA's outreach efforts, as it can house essential safety information as well as electronic material that organizations and the general public can download and use. The Web site is a central location for information and help outreach efforts through linking with partner sites, listing the site on hard-copy material, and sending out HTML e-mail blasts with links to the site. All materials will be available on the site and offered to partner Web sites.

As NHTSA prepares for outreach, the following updates to the Web site will ensure information is available to the public in an easy-to-understand format.

## **Content**

Available content is being updated to include the most recent, relevant information communicated in the most user-friendly format.

- Repurpose the consumer piece into easy-to-read subpages instead of the current PDF format. The PDF version can still be available to download and print featured as a separate button on the site.
- Develop instructional videos for users on the site and make them “shareable” with partner Web sites.
- Link to safety information from other partner or media sites.