



Healthcare

ALERTBULLETIN®

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Multi-passenger Vehicles: A Brief Guide to Fleet Safety

Vans and short buses are frequently used for transporting residents of aging services facilities to appointments, cultural events and other outings. These vehicle types are popular because they hold multiple passengers and are more convenient for wheelchair-bound residents. However, like all automobiles, they are vulnerable to traffic accidents, and because of their larger loads and top-heavy design, they are especially prone to highly dangerous rollovers. (See “Top Five Risk Factors for Van Rollovers” on [page 2](#).)

Transport-related risks have significant liability implications for aging services organizations, including exposure to costly claims based upon these common driving-related allegations, among others:

- **Negligent hiring** or retention of incompetent or unqualified drivers.
- **Failure to conduct background checks** on drivers to verify valid licensure and identify past traffic violations or DUIs.
- **Lack of training** in safely transporting residents in wheelchairs or with special needs, including the proper use of safety restraints.
- **Improper entrustment** of a facility-owned vehicle to an inexperienced or reckless driver.
- **Vicarious liability** for the negligent acts of drivers, including accidents due to impaired, aggressive, distracted or fatigued driving.
- **Insufficient staff** to assist resident passengers with entering and exiting vehicles, as well as to monitor their needs en route.
- **Absence of emergency equipment**, such as a first aid kit, fire extinguisher and emergency roadside flares.

To minimize the likelihood of resident injuries and consequent negligence claims, facilities should implement a comprehensive fleet safety program emphasizing collision and rollover prevention. This edition of *AlertBulletin*® lists basic risk control strategies, describes common driver-related risk factors that contribute to accidents and suggests specific countermeasures. Also included on [page 4](#) is a checklist of driving safety precautions for aging services administrators and operators of multi-passenger vehicles.

Fleet Safety Basics

Driving will never be a completely risk-free activity. With respect to vans and short buses, which have different driving characteristics than passenger cars, the risk is intensified. However, it is possible to minimize accidents and injuries by implementing a fleet safety program that incorporates the following 12 principles, among others:

1. **Compliance** with local, state and federal statutory and regulatory requirements.
2. **Written safety policies** encompassing such key safety issues as seatbelts, cellular telephone use and defensive driving.
3. **Established boarding and unloading protocols** to ensure that all residents are accounted for when departing from the facility, following all interim stops and upon return.
4. **Formal driver selection criteria** and evaluation protocols, including motor vehicle record checks and screening for operator fitness.
5. **Ongoing driver training**, focusing on defensive driving, passenger restraint use, properly loading and securing wheelchairs, vehicle maintenance and safety checks, and emergency procedures.

6. **Signed driver agreements** stating employees' commitment to adhere to traffic laws, as well as organizational safety protocols and expectations.
7. **Reasonable passenger limits** in vans and buses, with lower limits for less experienced drivers.
8. **Use of well-rated, crashworthy vehicles** equipped with such safety features as in-vehicle navigational systems, rearview screens and video cameras, as well as software that monitors drivers for hard braking, excessive accelerations, quick cornering and other hazardous driving behavior.
9. **Sound vehicle maintenance and inspection protocols**, mandating regular servicing and checking of tires, brakes and safety equipment.
10. **Thorough crash reporting and investigation protocols**, including review of accident severity and analysis of root cause(s), as well as securing of driver records, training materials used, vehicle maintenance records and other critical documents.
11. **Consistently enforced disciplinary measures**, including potential revocation of organizational driving privileges for speeding tickets, at-fault accidents and other violations.
12. **A safe driver reward/incentive program**, possibly including bonuses, special privileges and/or formal recognition.

Top Five Risk Factors for Van Rollovers

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, between 2010 and 2019 there were 235 rollovers involving multi-passenger vans, and 57 percent of the occupants of these overturned vehicles were ejected. Post-accident analysis reveals the following five major contributory factors:

1. **Too many passengers.** Vans with more than 10 occupants are three times more likely to overturn than those with fewer passengers.
2. **High speed.** Rollovers are five times more frequent on high-speed roads (i.e., those with speed limits over 50 mph).
3. **Twisting roads.** Rollovers are twice as likely to occur on curved roads than on straight ones.
4. **Overloading.** Rollover risk increases as the weight of the vehicle nears capacity.
5. **Improperly inflated tires.** Underinflated tires are more subject to blowouts, heightening the risk of overturning.

Source: [Non-profit Risk Management Center](#).

Driver Risk Factors and Mitigating Strategies

To a certain extent, the following four unsafe driving practices contribute to most accidents and traffic fatalities. Each hazard is followed by a range of associated preventive measures.



Impaired driving refers to a lessened ability to operate a vehicle due to the effects of alcohol and/or drugs, both legal and illicit.

- **Thoroughly review the driving history of vehicle operators** for DUIs and related moving violations, and require that they inform the organization immediately of any citations they receive, both work-related and in private life.
- **Educate authorized drivers** about the effects of impaired driving, including reduced reaction time, decreased concentration and lapses in judgment, even at consumption levels well below legal limits.
- **Prohibit impaired driving in writing**, emphasizing that violation of the rule may result in termination.



Aggressive driving refers to a driver becoming angry and erratic, typically due to a combination of irritability and stress. Aggression may escalate into dangerous "road rage," which can take the form of obscene gestures and language directed at other drivers, smashing or sideswiping their vehicles, or forcing them off the road.

- **Require drivers to sign a code of conduct** pledging their compliance with traffic regulations, organizational guidelines and safe driving habits.
- **Train vehicle operators in defensive driving tactics**, including anger management.
- **Caution authorized drivers against engaging in the following hazardous behaviors**, among others:
 - *Passing vehicles on the right* or weaving through traffic.
 - *"Tailgating,"* i.e., following other vehicles too closely.
 - *Using one's horn* to move slower drivers out of one's path.
 - *Speeding up* when another vehicle attempts to pass.
 - *Yelling at other drivers* or making insulting gestures.
- **Schedule pickups and drop offs conservatively**, permitting sufficient time for drivers to reach their destination without speeding.
- **Require authorized drivers to report all traffic citations**, and periodically check motor vehicle department records for accidents involving aggressive driving habits.



Distracted driving refers to the shifting of the driver's focus away from the road and toward some other task (such as talking, eating or applying makeup) or device (such as a smart phone, GPS unit or radio). There are three main types of distraction: *visual*, which involves taking one's eyes off the road; *manual*, which involves removing one or both hands from the wheel; and *cognitive*, which involves withdrawing attention from the task of driving.

- **Discuss the risks of distracted driving** during driver training sessions.
- **Require drivers to confirm in writing that they have read and understand organizational policies** regarding prevention of distracted driving.
- **Prohibit phone use while driving a facility vehicle**, including hands-free calling. Instruct drivers to pull over to a safe location before looking up directions, texting, or making or receiving a call.
- **Consider using phone-blocking technology** to limit cell phone use while driving.
- **Check mobile phone records of drivers** following an accident.

Require drivers to confirm in writing that they have read and understand organizational policies regarding prevention of **distracted driving**.



Driver fatigue refers to an altered state of awareness due to excessive driving, lack of sleep, stress and/or illness.

- **Employ a sufficient complement of drivers**, factoring in inevitable absences due to vacation days, sickness and staff turnover.
- **Coordinate with supervisors** to ensure that transport schedules are aligned with driver availability.
- **Limit overtime** and maximum allowable consecutive shifts.
- **Educate drivers about [sleep health](#) and [fatigue management](#)**.
- **Instruct employees to refrain from driving**, or to rest before continuing, if they experience the following symptoms of fatigue, among others: sore or heavy eyes, near-collisions, navigational lapses, drifting between lanes and driving at an inappropriate speed.
- **Review data from in-vehicle monitoring technologies** to detect possible signs of fatigue, such as failure to stay in one's lane.
- **Consider using automated measurement devices**, such as instrumented wristbands and sunglasses, to monitor driver fatigue.
- **Train incident investigators to assess the role of fatigue** in accidents and near-miss incidents.
- **After an accident has occurred, determine the number of hours worked by the driver** prior to the event as part of the accident investigation protocol.

As the nation's roads become more dangerous, it is incumbent upon aging services organizations to review their fleet safety programs. By working proactively to minimize both human and mechanical risk factors, organizations can help ensure that residents traveling via facility-owned vans or small buses arrive at their destinations safely and reliably, without incident or injury.

Quick Links

- "[Prepare a Fleet Safety Plan](#)," issued by OSHAcademy.™
- "[Risky Driving](#)," a resource issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- [Safe Driving Toolkit](#), offered by the National Safety Council.

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Checklist of Safety Precautions for Multi-passenger Vans and Buses

Precaution

Status

Facility-related:

Select appropriately licensed and experienced drivers, and expressly prohibit untrained staff or volunteers from driving vans or short buses.

Perform an initial proficiency assessment to ensure that drivers can safely operate a van or short bus, including, among other skills, a demonstrated ability to brake and accelerate, maneuver in parking lots, guard against blind spots when backing up or changing lanes, adjust for wet or icy surfaces, navigate curved roads and steer through turns at an appropriate speed.

Periodically reassess driver proficiency, especially following a prolonged period of not driving or an accident involving some degree of fault.

Document driver training and competencies regarding resident safety requirements, including disability awareness, basic life support, lift and ramp protocols, wheelchair handling policies, and proper use of seatbelts and other restraints.

Implement a rollover prevention protocol, which includes driver training on passenger load limits, even weight distribution, optimal tire pressure, mandatory passenger restraint use, and the effects of higher speeds and road curvature.

Conduct regular vehicle safety inspections, including documented checks of tire inflation and wear, brakes, exterior and emergency lights, AC/heating systems, safety restraints, emergency communications equipment and backup alarm, as well as the presence of a first aid kit and fire extinguisher.

Driver-related:

Prepare a master list of resident passengers, noting any special medical needs or necessary supplies, such as mobility aids, cushions, water bottles or snacks.

Supervise residents when they board a vehicle from the side or rear, first ensuring that the bus or van is at a complete standstill and safely parked in a traffic-free area.

Firmly secure wheelchairs as well as oxygen cylinders, and display an "oxygen in use" warning sign for emergency services personnel in the event of a crash or fire.

Prior to departure, check occupied seats to ensure that seatbelts are fastened and adjusted.

Refrain from conversing with passengers while driving, except in emergencies.

Never leave passengers unattended, even momentarily.

Prohibit passengers from operating doors or lifts, which could lead to serious injury.

Account for all passengers before departure, following stops and at the end of the trip, and document their safe exit upon arrival at a destination and upon return to the facility.

This resource serves as a reference for aging services organizations seeking to evaluate risk exposures associated with operating multi-passenger vehicles. The content is not intended to represent a comprehensive listing of all actions needed to address the subject matter, but rather is a means of initiating internal discussion and self-examination. Your organization and risks may be different from those addressed herein, and you may wish to modify the activities and questions noted herein to suit your individual organizational practice and resident needs. The information contained herein is not intended to establish any standard of care, or address the circumstances of any specific aging services organization. It is not intended to serve as legal advice appropriate for any particular factual situations, or to provide an acknowledgment that any given factual situation is covered under any CNA insurance policy. The material presented is not intended to constitute a binding contract. These statements do not constitute a risk management directive from CNA. No organization or individual should act upon this information without appropriate professional advice, including advice of legal counsel, given after a thorough examination of the individual situation, encompassing a review of relevant facts, laws and regulations. CNA assumes no responsibility for the consequences of the use or nonuse of this information.

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