

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY

Motor vehicle accidents involving the transport of church members can be catastrophic in terms of the numbers of people injured and the severity of injuries. The use of volunteers and private passenger automobiles also complicates the situation from an insurance perspective. For these reasons, the following loss control fundamentals should be surveyed and deficiencies corrected:

- Are all vehicle operators qualified (valid license and proper insurance limits) for their assignments and their vehicles?
- Are motor vehicle records (MVR's) checked as a condition of employment and annually thereafter for DUI/DWI and reckless driving conditions?
- When applicable, are Commercial Drivers License (CDL) requirements met for van drivers or bus drivers?
- Has a policy been established to what extent volunteers/church vehicles and private automobiles may be used on church business?
- Are employees and volunteers given a written exam and driving performance test before being allowed to transport passengers?
- Are all church vehicles subject to a regular interval inspection and preventive maintenance program?
- Is the use of seat belts mandatory in church vehicles?
- Are all buses and passenger vans subject to a pre- trip inspection of brakes, lights, tire pressure, safety equipment, etc.?
- Is there a documented defensive driver training and education program for employee drivers based on vehicle groups/driver classifications? Visit www.nsc.org/training/selectagency.cfm for a multiple listing of defensive driving courses in your area.
- Are the motor vehicle self inspection and preventive maintenance programs fully documented?
- Are church vehicles equipped with emergency equipment including a fire extinguisher, spare fuses, first aid kit and a set of reflective triangles?

15-Passenger Van Update

Research conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has prompted two safety advisory warnings about 15 passenger vans. There are now restrictions on selling such vans to organizations that intend to use them for transporting children. This is primarily because the risk of a rollover crash is greatly increased when 10 or more people ride in these vehicles.

NHTSA has issued a brochure entitled "Reducing the Risk of Rollover Crashes in 15, Passenger Vans." You can download a copy at their website, www.nhtsa.dot.gov . The following are some recommendations made by NHTSA:

- Fewer than 10 occupants.
- Load occupants from front to back.
- Required seat belt use for each occupant.
- Absolutely nothing loaded on the roof.

- Drive cautiously (maintain a speed that is safe under the conditions, and be especially careful on rural and curved roads).
- Only use drivers who have received specific training on the use of 15 passenger vans. Options include a van driver certification course offered by the National Safety Council. This should be repeated every three years.

Alternatives to 15-Passenger Vans

- Sell or trade in the vans and obtain minivans or a small school bus that has all of the features and equipment required by law.
- Rent a small school bus for special trips.
- Hire a bus and driver for special trips. You will have a professional, licensed driver and the charter company will have its own insurance.