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Tips for Van Drivers



Introduction

As a van driver, you have a responsibility to your passengers, to the State of Minnesota, and to the general public with whom you share the highway.

For many of you, driving a van is a new experience. This vehicle is larger and heavier than your personal car, and handles differently. Driving a van requires extra caution at all times. Be especially alert while becoming familiar with its characteristics.

This booklet provides “tips” for van drivers, and covers such areas as emergencies, maintenance, and passenger etiquette.

Compensating for Van Characteristics

Although a van handles differently from an automobile, you can learn to compensate for its characteristics and operate it smoothly and safely. Here are some tips to keep in mind when driving a van:

Making Turns: When turning a corner, you must make a wider swing with a van than you would with a car. Consequently, on a right turn, it’s necessary to watch the right outside mirrors for small vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles, and pedestrians.

Use turn signals well in advance.

Make turns more slowly than you would with a car. If you turn too quickly, the van will lean and make your passengers uncomfortable.

Whenever possible, don’t make “U” turns. Due to the van’s wider turning radius, a “U” turn may require you to make at least one backward movement. Avoid backward movement whenever possible.

Following Distance: A loaded van is more difficult to stop than an automobile traveling at the same speed. Therefore, you should use a *four-second* following rule for a van, as opposed to a three-second following rule for a car. The four-second rule works as follows: Count 1,001 – 1,002 – 1,003 – 1,004 after the rear of the vehicle you are following passes a fixed

object. If the front of your vehicle passes the same object before you count to 1,004, you are following too closely. Slow down.

Height of Van: The height of the van has advantages and disadvantages for the driver. On the plus side, it gives you a better view of the road ahead. On the negative side, many garages are not high enough to accommodate the van. You also have to watch for overhead obstructions such as trees and limbs.

The van can block the view of passenger cars following you. Drivers may attempt to pass you at an unsafe time or place, and thus, threaten to involve you in an accident. Watch both outside mirrors for these maneuvers.

Blind Spots: The van has blind spots on each side. Adjust your mirrors to reduce these as much as possible.

The greatest blind spot is to the rear when backing up. Your best defense is to back up only when necessary. Avoid backing into traffic. If you must back up, get out and check the area behind you before doing so. Turn on your four-way flashers and back slowly. Have your passenger(s) assist you, but be sure they understand what you expect from them.

To avoid striking a pedestrian, stop back from a crosswalk. Watch out for your own passengers walking across the front of the van as they board or leave.

When in a line of stop-and-go traffic, never get so close to the vehicle in front that you lose sight of its stoplight and directional signals.

Parking and Loading/Unloading: You will probably be assigned to a parking area. This area will be free from normal hazards, such as low branches and wires, fences, walls, and hydrants, and will be easy to pull in and out of. This may not be the case when you park the van elsewhere or at pick-up and drop-off locations. It is your responsibility to be aware of potential hazards. It is also essential that you lock the van when it is left unattended.

Driver's Responsibilities

Van drivers are required to do the following:

- Adhere to established van safety policies.
- Maintain a valid driver's license.
- Wear a seat belt.
- See that *all* passengers wear seat belts.
- Passengers should sit in the seats closest to the driver and be distributed evenly from side to side.
- Keep safety equipment assigned to the van in good condition and securely mounted.
- Practice good defensive driving techniques.
- Obey all posted speed limits, taking into consideration the road, the weather, traffic conditions, and pedestrians.
- Keep the floors and steps of the van free from items that could cause slips or falls or could be tossed around.
- Do not operate the van with any cargo stored on the roof.
- Use turn signals and/or flashers when changing lanes, making turns, stopping for passengers, or pulling over in an emergency.
- Follow established routes and schedules.
- Coordinate prescribed van inspections, service, maintenance, and cleaning.
- Maintain and submit on a schedule the daily, weekly, or monthly records required by the program administrator.
- Read, understand, and follow all directives and safety rules.
- Attend all driver safety meetings.
- Maintain control over passengers.
- Set a good example with regard to safety.
- Do not drive while feeling drowsy, or while taking medication that may cause drowsiness.
- Wear required eyeglasses or hearing aid while driving.

Accidents and Emergencies

Use common sense when a breakdown occurs on the road. *Put the safety of your passengers foremost.* Park the van as safely as possible off the traveled portion of the roadway, preferably not on a curve or at or over the crest of a hill. Apply the parking brake and place the transmission lever in park

(reverse if gear shift). Turn on the four-way flashers and shut off the engine. Set out triangle reflectors, if available.

In case of an accident:

1. Stop immediately.
2. Take required precautions to prevent further accidents at the scene. (Place triangle reflectors, if available.)
3. Render all reasonable assistance to persons injured at the scene. Ask someone at the scene to call the police. Also, give them the name and number of the program administrator, and ask them to call for necessary assistance.
4. Using the accident report forms provided, obtain necessary information. Obtain license numbers and descriptions of vehicles at the scene. This will be especially helpful if outside witnesses won't assist you.

Following an accident, give the program administrator (or designate) all the details by filling out the forms furnished you.

Obtain as much information as possible at the scene and furnish the names of the passengers at the time. They may be witnesses, or future claimants, if injured.

Defensive Driving Techniques

You will periodically receive directives from the program administrator on defensive driving techniques. During drivers' meetings, you may occasionally see films on the subject.

A defensive driver is one who:

1. Is careful to commit no driving errors.
2. Makes allowances for the lack of skill and improper attitude of other drivers.
3. Doesn't become involved in an accident or a close call because of weather, road conditions, traffic, or the actions of pedestrians and other drivers.
4. Keeps continually alert for accident-producing situations far enough in advance to take defensive action.
5. Concedes the right of way to prevent an accident.

Van Maintenance

Van maintenance and service should be completed on a time or mileage basis, as directed by the program administrator.

Your daily routine should include a pre-trip inspection. This should cover, as a minimum, but not be limited to, checking the service brakes, parking brakes, steering, all lights and turn signals, tires (including tire pressure), gauges, the engine (for smooth operation), and accessories (wipers, washers, washer fluid level, heater, and defroster). Report defects noted during daily operations.

During inclement weather, don't operate the van until you clear frost, ice, or snow from all windows, mirrors, and lights.

The physical condition and cleanliness of the van are your responsibility.

The program administrator will advise you as to where vans are to be serviced and cleaned, and of the availability of backup vans when yours is not working properly.

Van Etiquette

Familiarize your passengers with mandatory requirements, such as wearing seat belts, and enforce them.

As "captain of the ship," you set the routine for your van. This may require the following steps:

1. Establish a schedule that includes official pick-up and drop-off locations.
2. Advise passengers how to contact you (or your alternate) when they do not plan to ride the van.
3. Have your alternate driver occupy the seat next to you. The remaining seats are usually selected by the passengers. It may be advisable to work out preferred seating for a passenger who is temporarily or permanently disabled.
4. Establish with passengers a mutual understanding about the radio: types of programs and volume. It may be necessary to decide to not use the

radio when the passengers cannot reach agreement on it. (*Defensive driving requires that the volume not impair the driver's ability to hear outside horns or emergency vehicle sirens.*)

5. Smoking is a problem that arises in most van pools. You and your alternate must enforce whatever decision you and your passengers have made. (*Smoking is not permitted in vehicles owned by the State of Minnesota.*)
6. Air conditioning and heating can be a problem because of the individual preferences of individual passengers. A comfortable temperature for most passengers is approximately seventy degrees Fahrenheit. Have your alternate driver make any requested adjustments during travel so that you can concentrate on the road.

You, the driver, may be required to wear many hats to ensure the smooth operation of your van. Your program administrator is available to help you when you have a problem.

Use an agreement form (sample follows) that is signed by the vehicle driver which indicates they have received, read, and *understand* the information contained in the "Tips for Van Drivers" booklet.

I have received a copy of "Tips for Van Drivers" and have had the opportunity to read it and ask questions and/or obtain clarification about any of its provisions.

Driver's name _____

Driver's signature _____

Position _____ Date _____