

Protect Your People

For these reasons, we strongly urge all of the local churches in our annual conference to stop using 15 passenger vans and other vehicles not meeting the federal school bus safety standards. We ask that our churches do more than simply recognize the legal requirements placed on us by the state. Rather, we ask that we all embrace the safety of our people as a matter of highest importance as a reflection of the faith that calls us to love God and our neighbor. Help prevent a tragedy and protect the health and well-being of our members by stopping the use of 15 passenger vans and other vehicles not meeting the federal school bus safety standards now.

For those churches that currently own 15 passenger vans, we have included a list of tips to improve their safety until safer transportation is secured.

- The Bishop
and Cabinet of the South
Carolina Annual Conference

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SECTION 56-5-195. School bus safety standards. (South Carolina Code of Laws)

(A) Effective July 1, 2000, any entity transporting preprimary, primary, or secondary school students to or from school, school-related activities, or child care, and utilizing a vehicle defined as a "school bus" under 49 U.S.C. Section 30125, as defined on April 5, 2000, must transport these students in a vehicle meeting federal school bus safety standards, as contained in 49 U.S.C. Section 30101, et seq., or any successor statutes, and all applicable federal regulations. Nothing in this section prohibits the transportation of children to or from child care in nonconforming vehicles by a State of South Carolina human service provider or public transportation authority as long as each child is accompanied by a parent or legal guardian whose transportation is in connection with his work, education, or training.

(B) Notwithstanding subsection (A) of this section, any vehicle that is purchased before July 1, 2000, and is utilized to transport preprimary, primary, or secondary students to or from school, school-related activities, or child care is not subject to the requirements contained in subsection (A) of this section until July 1, 2006. A vehicle that is purchased on or after July 1, 2000, and is utilized to transport preprimary, primary, or secondary students to or from school, school-related activities, or child care is subject to the requirements contained in subsection (A) of this section once the vehicle is utilized for those purposes.

(C) Before July 1, 2006, nothing in this section may be construed to create a duty or other obligation to cease utilizing nonconforming vehicles purchased before the effective date of this act.

(D) To facilitate compliance with the provisions contained in this section, any entity contained in this section may purchase conforming vehicles under the State of South Carolina contracts for purchase of these vehicles.

(E) Nothing in the section prohibits the transportation of students by common carriers that are not exclusively engaged in the transportation of school students or by the entities subject to this section which own or operate these vehicles. However, the motor carriage used by the common carrier or entity to transport students must be designed to carry thirty or more passengers.



Safety First: The Dangers of Using 15 Passenger Vans



Produced by:
The Bishop and Cabinet of
The South Carolina Annual Conference

The Dangers of Using 15 Passenger Vans

We have become aware that there is a lot of confusion across our annual conference about the legality and the wisdom of using 15 passenger vans to transport our people to and from church related activities. This brochure is designed to present basic legal information and our values as we care for God's people

“Jacob’s Law”

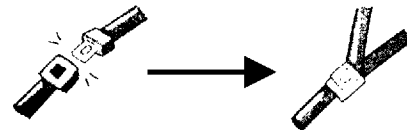
The laws of South Carolina state that as of July 1, 2006, all churches operating schools and child-care facilities must use vehicles that meet federal school bus safety standards. This requirement extends to transporting children to and from school or child care, and on related activities. This means that 15 passenger vans and other vehicles not meeting the federal school bus safety standards may not be used for these purposes.

The exact wording of this statute is found at the end of this brochure.

A Real Danger!

In 2001, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration issued a warning that the rollover rate of these vans is extremely high. Some of the safety statistics related to the use of these vans are:

- Passengers in vans are at least six times more likely to be killed than passengers in school buses.
- With 10 or more passengers, vans become three times more likely to roll over.
- With more than 15 passengers, vans are seven times more likely to roll over.
- Vans are built without the safety exits, multiple steel beams to protect passengers, and low centers of gravity that make school buses safer.
- Almost 80% of people who die in rollover accidents are not wearing safety belts, and passengers in vans are less prone to wear safety belts.



Christian Care

Our concern over the use of vans extends well beyond the simple question of legality. As servants of Christ who are called to love our neighbors and seek their good, we believe that we have a responsibility to transport our children and adults as safely as we reasonably can. Vans tend to be mostly used by our youngest members and our older members. They rely on the leadership of our congregations to exercise reasonable care to make certain that church related activities are safe. The death or serious injury of any person of any age is a tragedy that we should seek to avoid whenever possible.

Stewardship Issues

As vans are known to be more dangerous than buses in transporting people, there are liability issues related to their use. Briefly put, if someone is injured or killed in an accident with a 15 passenger van, the local church responsible will be asked why it continued to use a method of transportation known to be more dangerous than other alternatives. This may create a liability for that congregation which could drain money away from other ministries.