

UPCOMING ENROLLMENT DEADLINES:

Next:
Tuesday, September 18, 2012

Future:
Thursday, October 18, 2012
Friday, November 16, 2012



QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

Are students who provide volunteer services for the Department of the Navy eligible to receive transit benefits?

No, volunteers are not eligible to receive transit benefits.

DOES YOUR VANPOOL DRIVER KNOW HOW TO DRIVE?

The Naval Oceanographic Office at Stennis Space Center, Pascagoula, MS, recently developed a safety training presentation for vanpool operators and drivers (http://www.fmo.navy.mil/documents/Divisions/FMO3/Passenger_Van_Training_August_2012.pptx). Vanpools are one of five modes of mass transportation that are qualified means of transportation in the Transportation Incentive Program. In many rural locations, vanpools are often the only form of mass transportation available to Department of the Navy employees. Unlike other modes of mass transportation, vanpools are often operated and driven by DON employees rather than by professional drivers like with a bus or a train service. Department of Defense Instruction 6055.4 requires all passenger van drivers who are military personnel or DoD civilian personnel in a duty status to take safety training to operate passenger vans on Department of Defense Installations. Even vanpools that do not operate on a Department of Defense Installation can benefit from this valuable training.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recognizes that 12 to 15 passenger vans have an increased risk of crashes and rollover accidents if not properly driven and maintained. This increased risk is due to inexperienced drivers, improperly sized or inflated tires, or improperly loaded cargo/passengers affecting the vehicle's center of gravity. Passenger vans are substantially longer, taller and wider than a car and require additional reliance on the side mirrors and more space for changing lanes. Drivers must appreciate that passenger vans do not respond as safely to abrupt steering or braking maneuvers. The more weight you have and the higher the speed the van is traveling, the longer it takes to stop the vehicle. The training developed by the Naval Oceanographic Office identifies these and other risks and provides helpful guidance for safely operating a passenger van. The training includes basic reminders such as avoiding the use of a cell phone while driving, paying extra attention when changing lanes and taking steps to avoid driver fatigue.

The training outlines the following basic driving tips:

- Before entering an intersection, scan all directions, cover the brake with your foot and look for traffic, pedestrians, bicyclists and animals.
- Maneuvering around other vehicles can be dangerous, so ALWAYS leave plenty of space behind the vehicle ahead.
- Stop far enough behind the vehicle so that you can see their rear tires and pavement behind the vehicle.
- Always communicate your intentions by using your turn signals. A turn signal must be given continuously during at least the last 100 feet traveled before turning.
- Maintain a cushion of safety around the vehicle.

Passenger vehicles are also at increased risk for rollover accidents. Drivers should become familiar with ways to minimize the risk of rollovers. The training identifies the following behaviors that may help minimize the risk of a rollover:

- Reduce the speed of the vehicle BELOW the speed limit posted for all turns and poor road conditions. While the posted speed limit may be safe for cars, it MAY NOT be for passenger vans.
- If the van's wheels drop off the roadway, gradually reduce speed and steer back onto the roadway when it is safe to do so.
- Avoid panic-like steering and hard braking.
- Do not load items on top of the vehicle or tow a trailer.
- Do not overload the vehicle with passengers and/or equipment.
- Passengers should be distributed evenly from side to side for balance and sit towards the front of the vehicle.

The training also covers some basic common sense driving principles to encourage passenger van drivers to avoid aggressive driving and aggressive drivers.



- Do not cut people off.
- Do not tailgate.
- Use horn sparingly.
- Allow other drivers to merge.
- Drive courteously.
- Do not make eye contact with other drivers.
- Do not use inappropriate gestures or verbal taunts.
- Do not engage in confrontation.
- If a operator of another vehicle persists in attempting to engage in a confrontation, have a passenger call for emergency help and drive to a police station.

As we begin a new fiscal year, now is a great time to remind van drivers of these basic safety practices to ensure that we all get home safely.

A special thanks to the Naval Oceanographic Office for contributing to this article and sharing this training with others.

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