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VAN SAFETY

Vans have their own characteristics, and can create problems that are different from those created by buses, trucks, and cars. Here are some things to be aware of when operating a van.

Visibility -- Adjust mirrors to reduce blind spots as much as possible. The blind spot to the rear is especially troublesome when backing. (Of course, backup cameras and assistive braking technology that some vehicles have are great safety assets.)

Back only when necessary, and get out and check the area behind you before doing so, if that's possible. Avoid backing out into traffic. Back slowly, with flashers operating.

Remember, there may be a blind spot right in front caused by the height of the van. Stop a little farther back from a crosswalk and watch out for pedestrians. Don't get so close to a vehicle in front that you cannot see its brake lights and directional signals.

Be especially cautious when changing lanes, whether to the right or to the left, and be careful of the blind spots on both sides. Use turn signals before changing lanes, and check mirrors carefully.

Turning -- A van needs a wider swing than a car. On a right turn, watch outside mirrors carefully for pedestrians, bicycles, and other vehicles.

Avoid U-turns, especially when they might require you to back up slightly. Make turns more slowly than you do with a car.

Remember to use turn signals well in advance of beginning the turn.

Following Distance -- A van's braking patterns may be quite different from those of a car. A van may be more difficult to stop than an automobile traveling at the same speed. At the same time, the van might be brought to a very abrupt halt at some speeds. Adjust your following distance according to the stopping distance required for your van and your load.

Remember that while you may avoid colliding with the vehicle in front of you, your



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stop might be too abrupt for the vehicle behind you. Be sure to signal your intentions, allow enough following distance, and constantly scan the scene ahead and to the sides in order to avoid being caught by surprise.

Looking Around -- Vehicle accidents often happen when the driver is caught by surprise in a situation that he should have seen coming.

Don't just watch the road in front of you. Instead, scan.

Scan the scene by moving your eyes continuously. Don't stare ahead, don't fix your eyes on the vehicle in front of you, but keep checking cross traffic. Look to your sides, check mirrors to see what's behind, and look way ahead up the road.

By constantly taking in the whole picture, what is all around you, both nearby and far, you can prepare yourself for situations before you become involved in them.

You can pick escape routes, keep a cushion of space around you, and adjust your speed or prepare to brake.