

## Paratransit Van Operations

*There is a tremendous amount of responsibility when transporting individuals. While the task may seem simple on the surface, leaving details to chance could result in disastrous consequences. There is more to the job than getting behind the wheel and driving passengers from place to place.*

*Instituting a detailed Paratransit Vehicle Safety program may help vehicle operators perform properly and professionally. Initiating such a program is an important step in building a team of vehicle operators who are proficient in a service capable of fulfilling the vital need of clients.*

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Personnel requirements, developing SOGs and SOPs and vehicle and equipment maintenance are three areas from which a loss could occur. Controlling these may assist an organization in reducing the chance of an unfortunate loss.

### **Personnel Requirements**

Select, train and maintain safe operators. Maximizing favorable attributes of an operator by utilizing the following operations and methods:

- Recognize a number of abilities necessary for driving (attitude, fitness, judgment and driving characteristics).
- Maintain adequate staff/client ratios per unit.
- Develop and maintain proficiency through vehicle operation, driving orientation and on-going re-certification programs.
- Develop and maintain proficiency in client movement; handling and loading.
- Understand the importance of maintaining accurate and complete records.

### **Necessity of Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs)/ Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**

Organizations can be proactive and address key issues of Paratransit van driving and operation by developing and following guidelines. These may include:

- Eligibility requirements for drivers.
- Training and proficiency testing requirements.
- Transport procedures and requirements.
  - Route planning (consideration for client comfort and safety).
  - Identification of special considerations (terrain, stairs, patient size, etc.).
  - Proper positioning of the vehicle.
    - > Establish a circle of safety around a deployed lift utilizing traffic cones.
    - > Parking on uneven surfaces and along curbing.
  - Adequate client securement.
    - > Inspection of client wheelchair for integrity.
    - > Use of wheelchair lap belts.
    - > Engaging wheelchair brakes.
    - > Utilize correct anchoring points on a wheelchair frame.
    - > Attachment of the client's three point seat belt.

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- Proper loading and unloading processes.
  - > Positioning of wheelchair on the lift.
  - > Engaging wheelchair brakes.
  - > Manual and hydraulic use of the lift.
  - > Operator positioning while operating lift.

### **Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance & Inspection**

Regular inspection and maintenance of a Paratransit van and associated equipment is an essential step toward safe operation. Identify parts and components that need to be replaced or repaired, including but not be limited to:

- Inspect chair tie-downs for tears, frays and broken buckles along with floor track condition.
- Secure portable equipment.
- Inspect and maintain owned wheelchairs.
  - Inspect for loose or missing hardware from frame or cross braces.
  - Verify that the wheel locks prevent the wheelchair from moving when engaged.
  - Inspect the seat and back for tears or sagging.
- Professional service and routine inspection of the hydraulic lift.
  - Check overall operating condition (abnormal noises, binding, grinding).
  - Clean and lube moving parts.
  - Operate ramp for proper stow deploy switch adjustment.
  - Check inner and platform roll-stops for proper function.
  - Check hydraulic power unit fluid level and identify any visual leaks.
  - Inspect electrical wiring for fraying, chaffing or loose connections.
  - Check vehicle interlock for proper function.

Establishing a Paratransit Vehicle Safety program and adopting these or similar best practices into an organization may help reduce the risk of property damage and/or injury.

### **Additional Resources**

Transportation Safety for Wheelchair Occupants: A video presentation. Linda van Roosmalen, PhD. University of Pittsburgh. October 2005.

Transportation Safety Standards for Wheelchair Users: A review of voluntary standards for improved safety, usability, and independence of wheelchair-seated travelers. University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute. 2008.

Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Wheelchair Transportation Safety. [www.ercwts.org](http://www.ercwts.org)

Transportation Providers Credentialing. [www.logisticare.com](http://www.logisticare.com)