



# College Vehicle Handbook

Updated October 28, 2021

*Note: if there are discrepancies between the version of this handbook posted on the website vs. a hardcopy version of this handbook in the vans or elsewhere, the handbook posted on the website will be considered correct.*

## Driver Selection

- Students are eligible to apply for approval to drive Sterling vehicles only after successful completion of 12-credits, typically one semester, at the College.
- Applicants to become a student driver must be 19 years or older and have no less than 3 years of driving experience.
- Applicants must have an “acceptable” Driving Record in accordance with the Motor Vehicle Grading Criteria chart.
- Applicants must be in good standing in the community and not be on community review.
- Student applications are reviewed by the Assistant Dean of Academics and the Associate Dean of Work-Learning. The Dean of Student Life makes the final determination on eligibility.
- Employee drivers are reviewed and approved by the Dean of Finance & Operations.

## Motor Vehicle Records

It is Sterling policy that the operation of any College vehicle requires a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) meeting the grading requirements stated below. This MVR policy applies to all drivers of Sterling-owned, -leased, and -rented vehicles.

All drivers are required to submit an MVR update if there has been a violation. Job offers made to an employee-candidate for a position with driving duties may be contingent upon that candidate's MVR meeting the required standards. Continued driving privileges also require an MVR meeting the standards outlined below.

The standards for MVRs are as follows:

- All operators of College vehicles must have had a valid driver's license for at least three years.
- Driving records must remain "acceptable" as graded on the table below, in order to maintain status as a driver.
- There will not be any exceptions for drivers who operate student-occupied vehicles.
- Drivers must be familiar with Motor Vehicle Grading Criteria and report any relevant changes in their motor vehicle record status to the Assistant Dean of Academics & Registrar soon after they occur.

## Definition of Violations

**Minor violations:** All non-major violations are considered minor; the following will not be included in the count of violations:

- Motor vehicle equipment, load or size requirement
- Improper/failure to display license plates
- Failure to sign or display registration
- Failure to have a driver's license in possession (if valid license exists)

**Major Violations, include, but are not limited to:**

- Driving under influence of alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs.
- Failure to stop/report an accident
- Speeding more than 10 miles-per-hour over limit
- Reckless/careless driving
- Driving while impaired
- Making a false accident report
- Homicide, manslaughter or assault arising out of the use of a vehicle
- Driving while license is suspended/revoked
- Attempting to elude a police officer

**Motor Vehicle Grading Criteria (last three years)**

Under 21	Number of at-fault accidents		
Number of Minor Violations	0	1	2 or more
0	Acceptable	Ineligible	Ineligible
1	Acceptable	Ineligible	Ineligible
2	Acceptable	Ineligible	Ineligible
3 or more minor violations	Ineligible	Ineligible	Ineligible
Any major violation	Ineligible	Ineligible	Ineligible

Over 21	Number of at-fault accidents		
Number of Minor Violations	0	1	2 or more
0	Acceptable	Acceptable	Ineligible
1	Acceptable	Acceptable	Ineligible
2	Acceptable	Ineligible	Ineligible
3 or more minor violations	Ineligible	Ineligible	Ineligible
Any major violation	Ineligible	Ineligible	Ineligible

Tables provided by The St Paul Risk Control division as published in *Fleet Exposure Management*

## **Driver Training**

All drivers of vehicles that are owned, leased, or rented by Sterling, or driving on behalf of the College, will participate in driver training. There are three components to training: the Driver Policy Review Session, an online training with test, and a road test. Topics must include;

- College policies and procedures;
- Update MVR through self-reporting;
- Pre-trip inspections;
- Interstate and intrastate rules and regulations;
- Emergency protocol;
- Discussion of winter driving;
- Unique design characteristics of 15 passenger vans;
- Center of gravity and causes of lateral instability, under-steering and over-steering;
- Risks, history and causes of van rollovers;
- Weight distribution, loading and unloading;
- Characteristics of four-wheel drive (if used);
- Use of trailers or other special equipment shall require additional training and assessment which might include backing, hitching, trailer loading, tongue weight, safety equipment and other topics as deemed necessary in light of the conditions in which the trailer is to be operated.

## **Driver Assessment**

- An exam will be conducted requiring mastery of topics covered during driver training.
- A designated evaluator will conduct and document a practical exam.
- Performance evaluation must address road and driving conditions typically encountered while traveling.
- A separate assessment and documentation is required to operate a vehicle with a trailer.
- Drivers will be evaluated every twelve-months as part of their annual performance evaluation with their supervisor.
- A central log will be kept of all drivers in the Kane Hall copier room.
- Faculty/Staff and student driving records will be kept in files by the Assistant Dean of Academics & Registrar.

## **Ongoing Driver Evaluation**

- Sterling community members will have the opportunity to evaluate drivers for all exceptional driving behaviors, both positive and negative. This will be done via verbal feedback and the Driver Feedback Form found in the Kane Hall copier room and in this handbook Appendix A. Driver Feedback Forms will be reviewed by the Chair of the Risk Management Committee, who will promptly bring any issues or concerns to the attention of the appropriate person for review: Dean of Academics for faculty, Dean of Finance & Operation for other employees, and the Dean of Student Life for student drivers.
- If a vehicle is found with less than a half tank of gas, or not cleaned, the subsequent driver should fill out a Driver Feedback Form for the driver last responsible for the vehicle.
- Driver Feedback forms will be kept in employee files or, for students, in the student files in the Business Office.

## **Becoming an Approved Driver**

- Submit photocopy of driver's license to Assistant Dean of Academics and fill out paperwork authorizing the release of your MVR to the College.
- Read the Driver Handbook.
- Take the online training and test.
- Attend the Driver Policy Review Session.
- Complete the Driver Road Test with a designated tester.

## **Transportation Policies**

Transportation policies are applicable to the use of all vehicles while on school business. Henceforth, all vehicles being used for College business are referred to as "Sterling vehicles."

- Every driver of a Sterling vehicle must be an employee or student of the College.
- Every driver of a Sterling vehicle must be appropriately licensed for the type and class of vehicle they will be driving.
- Drivers must obey all federal, state and local laws and regulations applicable to vehicle operation while using a Sterling vehicle or while using a non-College vehicle to conduct College business.
- Seat belts must be worn correctly by all people in the vehicle when it is moving.
- The driver of a Sterling vehicle will not use a cell phone while driving.
- Sterling vehicles are not to be operated by anyone who has consumed even a small amount of alcohol or marijuana within the previous 8 hours.
- Drivers must be familiar with Motor Vehicle Grading Criteria and report any relevant changes in their MVR status to the Associate Dean of Academics & Registrar.
- Drivers must complete the Driver Policy Review Session and successfully complete the online training and test annually.
- Any driver or supervisor may cancel an academic or student trip that involves driving for safety reasons.

## **Vehicle Operating Procedures**

### **1. Vehicle Checkout**

- Reserve vans on the College Google vehicle calendar.
- Reservations for student driver use are approved and added to the calendar by the supervising faculty or staff member.
- Van sign out board and keys are located in the copier room.
- Before each use, the driver must complete the vehicle inspection log and visual check, located in the vehicle binder.
- The driver must have a valid drivers license in the vehicle at all times when driving a College vehicle.
- The driver must establish a passenger to fulfill the 'navigator' role. It is this person's duty to perform all tasks non-essential to direct driving responsibilities. This includes communication with students, curbing horseplay, dashboard adjustments, etc., and all actual navigation or map reading.
- Drivers must remember that their driving habits and behaviors reflect directly on Sterling, and must keep this in mind from check-out to check-in of the vehicle.

### **2. Loading**

- No loads shall be placed on the roof of a college vehicle.
- When possible, utilize an additional vehicle to transport packs and gear.
- When possible, avoid loading occupants in the rear seat of the van.
- No vehicle may transport more passengers than there are working seatbelts.
- Vans will be loaded prioritizing all weight low and to the front of the vehicle.

- Loads shall not exceed the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) and ideally should be well under this rating.
- Gear should be consolidated and either placed under seats or secured to a seat post.
- Avoid travelling with loose gear in the vehicle.
- There will be no riders in the back of the College pick-up truck.

### **3. Alcohol and Drugs:**

- Consumption of alcohol and possession or consumption of illegal drugs by anyone in a Sterling vehicle is prohibited.
- Sterling vehicles are not to be driven by anyone who has consumed alcohol, marijuana, or any other illegal substance within the last 8 hours. Any person under the influence of prescription or nonprescription drugs with adverse effects, such as drowsiness, may not operate a Sterling vehicle.
- Smoking is prohibited in Sterling vehicles.

### **4. Driving Duration and Times:**

- Faculty should allow sufficient time for transports when designing courses. Nothing is worth speeding or rushing when dealing with vehicles.
- No driver shall operate a motor vehicle for more than six consecutive hours or ten total hours in a day. Drivers should take breaks about every two hours.
- No trip should exceed 16 hours in a 24-hour period.
- If a passenger, who is also a certified driver, asks the driver to pull over and switch positions, the driver must do so.
- Drivers should avoid driving in the dark when possible.
- If, at any time, all approved drivers are too tired to be behind the wheel, stop and rest.

### **5. Post Drive**

- Fill the gas tank, if less than half full, before returning to the College.
- Clean out the vehicle after every use.
- Report minor mechanical problems to the Director of Buildings & Grounds immediately.
- Report major mechanical problems to the Director of Buildings & Grounds and the Assistant Dean of Academics & Registrar immediately and put keys in the "Maintenance" mailbox.
- Return keys to the lock box in the copy room and complete the vehicle sign out/in sheet.

## **Covid-19 Van Policies**

Please visit [the Covid-19 page of Sterling's website](#) for the latest Covid-19 guidance, including guidance for use of the vans. Reach out to the Dean of Community, Assistant Dean of Community, or Director of Wellness services if you have any questions regarding Covid-19 and van use. Be sure to cc your instructor.

## **Accident / Incident Procedures**

### **At the scene of an accident the driver should:**

- Assess the health of all persons involved, call 911 for ambulance services, if necessary, and ask for assistance of bystanders, if necessary.
- Contact Sterling as soon as reasonable or possible. See Appendix B for a list of emergency phone numbers.
- Remain on the scene if at all possible, protect the scene and passengers, activate emergency signals on vehicles and set reflective triangles. Passengers should be relocated to a safe location if needed.
- Notify the police of the accident, and record name and badge number of the officer.

- Record name, license number and insurance information of the other driver.
- Record names and addresses of bystanders.
- Avoid arguing, and make no statement except to the proper authorities.
- Fill out and sign only the official police report.
- When possible, take pictures to thoroughly document any accident or incident.

**Immediately following an accident or violation of traffic law and/or transportation policy the driver should:**

- Upon return to the College, submit an Incident Report Form, along with any other documented information, to the chair of the Risk Management Committee.
- Failure to report an accident or law violation will result in loss of driving privileges.
- All documentation (Incident Report, accident report, photographs, copy of traffic violation, if applicable, and any narrative) will be stored in the Business Office.

**Accident / Incident Review Process**

- The Dean of Finance & Operations will investigate all accidents, violations of Sterling policy (as reported on driver feedback form) and traffic law violations, and determine if a driver is still eligible.
- Consistent poor driver feedback form evaluations or failure to follow transportation procedures may be assessed as a minor violation.
- Consequences decided by the Dean of Finance & Operations could include:
  - The driver being asked to pay a portion of repairs.
  - The driver's eligibility status being re-evaluated based on the assessment of minor or major violations, or at-fault accidents.
  - Temporary revocation of driving privileges during an extending investigation.
  - Meeting with the direct supervisor, including documentation of verbal or written warnings.
- Restoration of driving privileges occurs when approved by the Dean of Finance & Operations.

**Vehicle Inspection and Preparation**

The pre-drive Vehicle Inspection Form will be completed prior to every drive. Inspection includes:

- Existing damage to vehicle
- Tire condition
- Headlights, windows and windshield, brake lights and turn signals
- Seatbelts

**Equipment in Vehicle**

Each vehicle will have an up-to-date binder that includes the following:

- Vehicle Inspection Form
- Insurance and registration
- Driver Handbook
- Emergency Call Guide
- Driver feedback forms
- Accident / Incident Forms

**Safety Equipment:**

- Jack and lug wrench
- Spare tire
- First aid kit
- Reflective triangles
- Fire extinguisher
- Spare fluids

- Jumper cables
- Tow Ropes

## **Driving the Vehicle**

### **Headlights**

- Drive with headlights on--out of auto mode--at all times.

### **Driver Hands Position**

- Hands at "3 o'clock" and "9 o'clock" on the steering wheel. This helps to prevent injury from airbags and allows for maximum control of the wheel in the event of an impact.
- Adjust the steering wheel so that it is pointed at the driver's chest, not face.

### **Speed Limits**

Follow all posted speed limits. In Vermont, if a paved road speed limit is not posted the limit is 50 mph

- Drive 35 mph or less on unpaved surfaces.
- On paved roads do not exceed 60 mph (even in good conditions).
- Turn off overdrive if driving under 45 mph or on steep grade.
- On unpaved roads vehicles towing trailers should travel 30 mph or less.
- On paved roads vehicles towing trailers should not exceed 60 mph, or the speed listed on the trailer.

### **Unpaved Roads**

- While driving on unpaved "dirt" roads turn overdrive off.
- Avoid the shoulder of dirt roads, especially when wet and/or near steep embankments,
- Drive in the middle of the road, except when rounding curves, approaching another vehicle, or the top of a hill.
- Drive slowly through "washboard" areas, as these can cause a vehicle to bounce and then "float" off the road.
- Do not make evasive maneuvers to avoid trouble areas in a dirt road. Instead, slow significantly and drive carefully through or around these areas.
- When meeting another vehicle on a dirt road, slow down and move to the right. Consider stopping to let the other vehicle pass you.

### **Curves**

- Approach all curves as though you will meet another vehicle. Blow the horn on all blind curves.

### **Reversing**

- If reversing is required, inspect carefully behind you for objective hazards.
- If the view is impaired or the terrain is tight in any way, have a helper step outside to assist you.
- Ensure visual contact and agree on hand signals, especially one that means "stop".
- It is helpful to give a warning honk when backing a vehicle.

### **Night Driving**

- Keep headlights clean.
- The probability of being on the road with impaired drivers increases greatly at night. Signs of impaired drivers include: swerving, driving too fast, driving too slow or any other erratic behaviors.
- Slow down, increase following distance and keep a watch out for people and animals.



## **Braking**

- Do not 'pump' brakes on vehicles. All Sterling vans and trucks come equipped with Anti-lock Braking Systems, which automatically "pump" the brakes while you hold steady pressure on the pedal.
- OD OFF or "Overdrive Off" is used to restrict the automatic transmission from utilizing fourth gear. This helps prevent overuse of the brakes, and relieves the transmission from unnecessary shifting. Please ensure the OD OFF light is on whenever traveling below 45 mph.
- While going downhill with significant weight in the vehicle, slow the vehicle by shifting to a lower gear to prevent overheating of brakes.
- Watch the road ahead to anticipate potential problems, and then cover your brake when needed. To cover your brake, move your foot from the gas pedal and hold it above the brake pedal. The vehicle will begin to slow from the lack of gas, and your reaction time will be shortened should you need to brake.

## **Cushion of Safety**

- Pay careful attention to your vehicle's "cushion of safety" at all times. This is the following distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. When following another vehicle, allow for a space cushion of 4 seconds.
- To determine your "cushion of safety," note when the vehicle in front of you passes a stationary object, then count how many seconds it takes your vehicle to pass the same object.
- Add one second to the following distance if:
  - Following a bike or motorcycle
  - Being tailgated by another vehicle
  - Driving in heavy traffic
- Add two seconds if:
  - Pulling a trailer
  - Driving in reduced visibility conditions or adverse weather
  - Driving in reduced traction conditions

## **Winter Driving**

Snow and ice should be cleared off the vehicle including the roof before driving. Be sure front, back and driver and front passenger side windows are clear with good visibility.

- Do not use cruise control when driving on any slippery surface.
- Drive slowly. Adjust your speed to account for lower traction
- Accelerate and decelerate slowly. Apply gas slowly to regain traction and avoid skids.
- Increase your following distance to 6 seconds
- Don't stop going uphill. Get some inertia going in a flat roadway before taking on a hill.

## **Trailer Operating Procedures**

Driving a vehicle with a trailer in tow requires an increased level of expertise and is a significant responsibility. To be qualified for this involves additional testing. Use caution when driving with trailers. Drive in a fashion that allows you to maintain control over the vehicle at all times. If the vehicle is difficult to handle, reduce your speed and adjust the load of the vehicle and trailer until it is possible to maintain adequate control.

Only approved drivers who have passed all requirements for trailer driver assessment will drive vehicles while towing a trailer.

- On unpaved surfaces vehicles towing trailers will drive 30 mph or less.



- Trailer design and construction must meet all D.O.T., state and local regulations.

### **Pre-Driving Inspection**

- Inspect overall structure of the trailer.
- Check tire pressure and wear on all tires, including the spare.
- Back van to trailer, with help.
- Place trailer hitch on ball.
- Make sure the hitch is on the ball and fits snugly.
- Attach lock, safety chains, and light plug.
- When hooking up the safety chains they should be crossed and back-hooked.
- Check all lights.
- Regardless of who attached the hitch, recheck hitch connections, safety chains, hitch lock and power plug.

### **Trailer Loading**

One of the most critical aspects of safely operating a trailer is understanding the weight involved and how to load it properly. An imbalanced trailer load, particularly top-heavy or lopsided loads, can cause serious problems while cornering and can even cause the trailer to roll over.

### **Canoe/Kayak Trailers**

- Load boats in such a way as to distribute the weight evenly over the axle or between the wheels. If it is not possible to load the majority of the weight over the axle, load towards the tongue rather than the rear of the trailer, but do not exceed the limits of the trailer hitch. Check that canoe center thwarts are close to straight above the axle.
- All cargo that is not inside trailer boxes should be secured to avoid any sideways as well as forward or backward movements.
- Load canoes/kayaks onto trailers keeping the load as low as possible. Push each boat toward the center of the trailer. Secure each canoe/kayak with two lines over the hull and tied to the crossbar of the trailer. Tie bow painters to the upright support on the trailer.
- Be sure the trailer is properly loaded before driving. The driver is responsible for the load, regardless of who loaded the van/trailer. Walk around and check all is secure, and weight is evenly distributed. Regardless of who attached the hitch, recheck hitch connections, safety chains, power plug and lights.

### **Driving with canoe/kayak trailers**

- Check that the boats are tied on properly. They should be tied on using the ropes attached to the trailer and the bow lines. The ropes should be tight and secure.
- After traveling 5 miles, or an appropriate distance, stop and check that the trailer hitch and tie downs are still secure, especially if the ropes started dry and have become wet.
- Canoe/Kayak trailers have a significant impact on vehicle handling. This includes an increase in stopping distance, and a decrease in maneuverability. Vehicles towing canoe/kayak trailers make wider turns than usual.
- In some cases, the motion of the trailer may increase the difficulty of steering. On a curving road, canoe/kayak trailers will track 12" - 18" to the inside of the front wheel of the vehicle. This makes it necessary for the driver to initiate wide turns. When backing a canoe trailer and van in tight areas, the driver must, if possible, post another staff person outside the vehicle to give directions.

### **Cargo trailers**

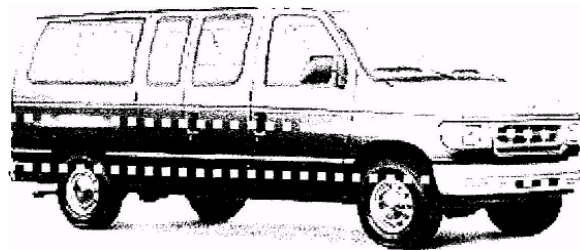
- Load cargo in such a way as to distribute the weight evenly over the axle.
- If it is not possible to load the majority of the weight over the axle, load towards the tongue rather than the rear of the trailer, but do not exceed the limits of the trailer hitch.
- All cargo should be secured to avoid sideways as well as forward or backward movements.

- Use floor anchor points in combination with rope, webbing or cargo nets.
- Be sure the trailer is properly loaded before driving. The driver is responsible for the load, regardless of who loaded the vehicle and trailer.
- Regardless of who attached the hitch, recheck hitch connections, safety chains, power plug and lights.
- After traveling 5 miles, or an appropriate distance, stop and check that the trailer hitch, safety chains and light plug are still connected.

### **Trailer detachment while underway**

- Detachment of the trailer from the vehicle while driving is an extremely dangerous situation. There is a significant risk of losing control of the vehicle and having an accident. Always check carefully to be sure that the trailer is properly connected and that the safety chains are attached before driving and after stopping. Do not attempt to operate any trailer if there is anything wrong with the hitch coupling or safety chains.
- In the event of a trailer detachment, do not apply the brakes suddenly. This will cause a collision between the trailer and the vehicle. Slow down as gradually as possible. Remove your foot from the accelerator. Shift the transmission to a lower position to increase engine braking if necessary. Stop the vehicle and pull off the road as soon as safely possible. There will be a momentary decrease in vehicle weight and then an increase in drag as the safety chains snap and the trailer tongue begins to drag. It will become substantially more difficult to maintain control of the vehicle. There is a risk of collision between the trailer and the vehicle, however some trailers may sway but follow the vehicle without incident. Passengers should be instructed to face forward and the rear seat passengers should duck their heads in order to reduce the risk of injury. Put on emergency flashers and be aware they may register for the van only.

### **Center of Gravity**



The lower line (••••) represents the plane in which the center of gravity of a van loaded with five or less occupants floats. The upper line (••••) shows where the combined center of gravity is when the vehicle is fully loaded.

(Slide from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

### **General Driving Strategies**

- The most important tool in driving the fifteen-passenger van is SLOWING DOWN.
- Use a light foot on the gas; accelerate slowly and evenly.
- Ensure a four or more second cushion of safety while driving.
- Increase use of mirrors and spotters.
- Make conservative choices when changing lanes.
- Allow more braking time and distance to start and stop the vehicle when possible.
- Load van properly with weight as low and as far forward as possible.
- Avoid evasive maneuvers if possible but learn how to handle them.
- Follow all Sterling College policies and procedures.

## **Reducing Rollover Risk**

(From *Reducing the Risk of Rollover crashes in 15-passenger Vans*. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

- Avoid conditions that lead to a loss of control and require evasive maneuvering.
- Drivers should always be well rested and attentive.
- Always slow down if weather is adverse in any way, including: snow, ice, rain, or fog.
- Be particularly cautious on curved rural roads. Maintain required speeds or lower to avoid running off the road.
- Know what to do if the wheels drop off the road. Unless clearly more dangerous (cliff edge), gradually reduce speed and steer back onto the roadway when it is safe to do so.
- Intentionally load vehicles. This includes remaining under the Gross Vehicle Weight and Combined Vehicle Weight and loading from front to back.
- Properly maintain tires and check them regularly. Make sure they are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down. Worn tires can cause handling problems and can lead to tire failures such as blowouts.

## **Avoiding Hydroplaning**

- Hydroplaning can occur whenever excessive water has accumulated on a driving surface, most often a paved surface. A layer of water between the tire and the road creates an unstable situation in which the vehicle's tires are separated from the road surface.
- Hydroplaning is a potential hazard whenever water creates a reflective surface on the roadway. Other signs of possible hydroplane conditions include raindrops bubbling on the road and a sloshing sound coming from your tires.
- It is possible to hydroplane at speeds as low as 30 mph and with heavy vehicles such as vans.
- If conditions are present for hydroplaning:
  - Avoid driving if at all possible. If conditions worsen drastically while you are on the road, pull over and wait until they improve.
  - Slow the vehicle by releasing the gas pedal.
  - Avoid hard braking of the vehicle, braking may send you into a skid.
  - Avoid sharp turns and drive in the tracks of the vehicle in front of you.
  - Be aware of your space cushion and increase your following distance.

## **Evasive Steering**

- Vehicles do not tend to roll over while going in a straight line! Similarly, it is extremely rare that a vehicle rolls over after a single hard steer. It is virtually always in the second phase of an evasive maneuver that a driver loses control. (*Training the 15 Passenger Van Driver* - Tom Heck and David Lasky)
- Drivers must learn to utilize more gentle evasive steering techniques in which the second phase of the turn is more gradual.
- Weigh carefully the consequences of any evasive maneuver. Choose to hit a squirrel rather than endanger the lives of a van full of passengers.
- To come out of a skid:
  - Remain calm and remove your foot from the brake pedal to slow the vehicle;
  - Gradually steer the vehicle in a safe direction. Do not over-correct or make sudden, sharp turns.