

Minibuses - Loading and Safety

Much concern has been generated among minibus users by recent press articles concerning overloading minibuses. The articles have illustrated that it is all too easy for unsuspecting minibus operators or drivers to use minibuses that are over-loaded.

The majority of minibuses, have a pre-determined specified maximum gross vehicle weight (GVW). This figure is to be found in the manufacturer's handbook provided with the vehicle from new; or through the local dealership.

It is VITAL that this weight is not exceeded at any time. Over-loading is illegal and is also potentially unsafe. Minibuses handle significantly differently from private cars, whether laden or empty. Overloading, even by small margins, may make the vehicle more difficult to control and it will increase its braking distances. In some circumstances, this may lead to an accident.

Minibus operators (for example, schools) may inadvertently overload their vehicles simply by transporting a full complement of passengers. RoSPA's advice is:

1. Find out the minibus' maximum gross vehicle weight.
2. Take the minibus to the local weighbridge (if possible) and weigh it in it's fully-fuelled 'ready to use' state and with any equipment which is permanently carried in the vehicle, but with no passengers or additional equipment. (This is its kerb-weight).
3. Fix a waterproof label to the vehicle dashboard in clear sight of the driver detailing:
 - a. the kerb-weight
 - b. the gross vehicle weight (GVW)
 - c. the maximum permitted additional load (passengers, luggage and equipment).
4. For every journey, you should make an accurate estimate of the weight of the passengers, driver and additional luggage or equipment to be carried. (It may be impractical to actually weigh all the passengers and luggage or to take the laden vehicle to a weighbridge for each journey).
5. If the vehicle's maximum gross vehicle weight will be exceeded, then the number of passengers or the amount of equipment to be carried must be reduced. If the minibus is meant to carry two front seat passengers, reduce this to one front passenger, before reducing the number carried in the rear of the vehicle.
6. Provide clear guidance to ALL drivers, and keep a copy in the vehicle, explaining the need to check the gross vehicle weight before every journey.
7. If driving a minibus which is close to its maximum weight limit, remember that its braking distances will increase and reduce driving speed accordingly.

EXAMPLE

Minibus kerbweight	2257kg
1 x Driver (approx 75kg)	75kg
16 x passengers @ approx 70kg each	1120kg

Luggage for 16 passengers @ 3kg 48kg
each

Total 3500kg