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A minibus is seen changing lanes dangerously without any indication. A senior police official has said the vehicles should not be licensed as a means of passenger transport.

Minibuses not safe to carry passengers

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Dubai: Approximately 21 per cent of all road fatalities in the first three months of this year have been caused by accidents involving minibuses, a top traffic police official said.

In the first three months of this year alone, nine minibus accidents resulted in the death of 14 people as compared to 30 minibus accidents and 31 resultant fatalities in all of 2008. In all, 76 people have lost their lives in road accidents this year.

Traffic department statistics reveal that around 10.5 per cent of road fatalities in Dubai last year were caused by minibus crashes.

The figures also show that, although there is an increase in road fatalities caused by accidents involving minibuses, there is an overall 3 per cent decline in road accidents and 24.3 per cent decline in fatalities in the first eight months of this year in comparison to 2008.

Based on an analysis by the traffic department, Major General Mohammad Zaif Al Zafein, Director of Dubai Police Traffic Department, maintains that minibus licences must be abolished as they pose a threat to the lives of the driver and passengers besides other motorists.

"It is classified as a lightweight vehicle which could be driven by anyone with the average light vehicle licence. The minibus doesn't have the basic safety features present in other vehicles. It holds around 14 passengers seated very close to each other and can't be used to transport passengers as its structure is not strong enough to hold this number of passengers. This vehicle is unstable and it could deceive the driver," Major General Al Zafein told Gulf News.

An initial campaign against the use of minibuses as a means of passenger transport was launched earlier this year with officials directing owners of the vehicles to ensure that their maximum passenger capacity was reduced from 16 to nine.

However, this regulation has been flouted with disdain and over 4,130 minibuses have been confiscated since the beginning of the year in comparison to around 6,000 last year.

Major General Al Zafein blamed Sunday's horrific minibus accident, which claimed the lives of seven people, on the continued use of minibuses as a means of passenger transport.

"Minibuses should only be used for transporting goods within a specific weight limit but never for passengers," he said while describing minibuses as akin to moving coffins.

"I also extend my caution to school private and public buses not to use minibuses."

Major General Al Zafein said he has urged the Roads and Transport Authority to stop issuing permits for this class of vehicles as a means of passenger transport, adding that a decision in this regard now rests with the Emirates Authority for Standardisation and Metrology.

"We have relentlessly campaigned for minibus safe driving but the situation indicates that the problem persists. We need to stop issuing licences for these vehicles," he said.

76 die as a result of minibus crashes this year

2008 (Jan-Aug) Road accidents: 2,563
Road fatalities: 193

Major road fatalities
Pedestrian: 62
Speeding: 34

Sudden swerving of vehicle: 15

Entering the road without checking: 19

2009 (Jan-Aug)
Road accidents: 2,485 (decline by 3 percent)
Road fatalities: 146 (decline 24.3 percent)

Major road fatalities

Pedestrian: 44 (decline by 29 percent)
Speeding: 14 (decline by 59 percent)
Sudden swerving of vehicle: 18 (increase by 20 percent)
Entering the road without checking: 9 (decline by 53 percent)

Timeline: Death by minibus

04/10/09 Seven people died and eleven were injured after a minibus rammed a vehicle on the Dubai-AI Ain highway

25/2/09 A minibus driver was killed and all 14 people on board the vehicle injured after it collided with a car and caught fire in Sharjah

9/02/09 Three people died in an accident on the Dubai-Lahbab Road when a minibus carrying 15 people collided with an SUV causing it to overturn and land on the other side of the road

16/07/08 Two people were killed and 15 others sustained injuries after a speeding minibus lost control and slammed into a concrete barrier on Emirates Road

13/07/08 Five people including three women died after a minibus swerved and landed in the opposite carriageway near Wafi City,

Dubai Comparison 2008 (Jan-Aug)

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