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How to Modify Minivans for Wheelchair Use

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Instructions

Difficulty: Moderate

1. Consult a Driver Rehabilitation specialist. There are physical and occupational therapists who have been trained and certified in driver rehabilitation. If you are someone who uses a wheelchair and wants to have the independence gained by driving, start your vehicle search by consulting with a driver rehabilitation specialist. She will assess your abilities and help you determine what modifications you need to make safe driving possible. She will also be able to give you a prescription for your adaptive equipment, which you will need if you are trying to get a reimbursement from a dealer.
2. Consult a mobility equipment dealer. These are dealers that specialize in adaptive equipment for vehicles . They have been trained and certified and will be able to tell you what equipment you will need as a driver or passenger. Because adaptive equipment can be so expensive, it's important to consult a trained expert before investing money.
3. Confirm that the adaptive equipment recommended by either your Driver Rehabilitation Therapist or mobility equipment dealer is in compliance with your state's motor vehicle agency regulations for adaptive equipment.
4. Choose the proper vehicle. Your mobility equipment dealer will point you in the right direction so you can purchase or lease a vehicle that is easily adaptable. Chrysler, Ford and General Motors all manufacture mini and full-sized vans that have dropped floors which are needed for any wheelchair modification. All three also offer rebate or reimbursement programs.
5. Hire a National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) certified dealer to install your adaptive equipment. NMEDA is a non-profit organization that certifies dealers for reliable and safe installation of vehicle adaptive aids. By choosing an installer that is certified you can be sure that your vehicle is compliant with National Highway Traffic Safety Administration standards.
6. Train on your new adaptive equipment with your mobility equipment dealer before going out on the road. Drivers using adaptive equipment to operate the vehicle should train with the Driver Rehabilitation Specialist over several sessions to make sure that he is familiar and comfortable with new vehicle operation equipment. Caregivers who are transporting someone in a wheelchair should practice using new transportation equipment, such as ramps and chair tie downs, with a mobility equipment dealer before attempting to transport anyone.

Things You'll Need:

Driver or ability evaluation

Prescription for adaptive equipment

References

- National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association
- Ford Mobility Motoring
- New Mobility: Lowered Floor Minivans
- Car Talk: Vehicles to Accommodate Disabled Passengers

Resources

- The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists
- Locate a NMEDA Dealer

Photo Credit

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