

NLWJC - Kagan

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**Consumer Safety - Safety Seats Radio
Address**

President Clinton Announces new Uniform, Easy-to-Use System
for Attaching Child Safety Seats to Vehicles
February 15, 1997

Announcement

- o President Clinton announced today that the Department of Transportation (DOT), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), will propose a new universal attachment system for child safety seats.
- o **All new passenger cars, vans, and trucks -- and all new child safety seats -- would have a standard attachment.** Vehicle seats would be required to have two flat latch plates -- like those for safety belts -- located where the seat back and cushion come together. Child safety seats would have a belt with a buckle on each side of the seat to attach to the vehicle latch plates. To secure the top, there would be a ring behind the vehicle seat and a strap on the child seat that hooks onto the ring.
- o **The proposal is expected to improve proper use of safety seats, saving dozens of lives and preventing thousands of injuries annually of children four years old and younger.** It is also expected to increase safety seat use by reducing consumer frustration. The requirements would take effect two years after NHTSA issues a final rule.

Background

- o **Child safety seats are the most effective safety device available for small children, but too often are not used properly.** They reduce the risk of fatality or serious injury for infants (up to age 1) by almost 70 percent and for toddlers (ages 1 to 4) by over half. All fifty states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring their use. But child seats are often difficult to use properly, and not all 100 models of safety seats available fit in all 900 passenger vehicle models. As a result, an estimated 80% of the time parents and caretakers fail to properly secure children in seats or fully attach seats to vehicle, putting children at risk. And too many parents don't use seats at all -- toddlers are in car seats only 60% of the time. Properly securing children in car seats 100% of the time would save hundreds of lives annually.
- o **To address the problems associated with child safety seat installation and use, two years ago Transportation Secretary Peña and NHTSA Administrator Ricardo Martinez convened a "Blue Ribbon Panel" of experts -- including automobile and safety seat manufacturers, the medical community, and safety advocates. The panel's top recommendation was a uniform attachment system like that proposed today.**

Clinton Administration Actions to Improve Child Passenger Safety Include:

- o **Zero tolerance of alcohol --** At the President's urging, Congress passed legislation and DOT subsequently issued a rule requiring states to pass laws making it illegal for people under 21 to drive with any alcohol in their blood.
- o **Teen drug tests as a condition of drivers licenses --** the President directed Federal agencies to develop a plan to reduce teen drug use and driving under the influence of drugs by testing and other measures.
- o **Measures to make air bags safer --** DOT issued final rules requiring bold warning labels on vehicles and child safety seats and permitting cut-off switches on vehicles with no back seats; DOT proposed rules to depower air bags so they will be safer for children and to allow owners to deactivate air bags where appropriate. DOT plans to propose to phase in "smart" air bags. DOT also launched a public-private education campaign to teach families about air bag safety.
- o **Increasing seat-belt use --** The President directed DOT to develop a plan, due in March, to significantly raise seatbelt use rates nationally.

Questions and Answers On Universal Attachment Child Restraint System

What is NHTSA proposing as a Universal Attachment Child Restraint System?

NHTSA is proposing a standard method of attaching child safety seats to vehicles. The hardware will always be the same, whether in a passenger car, light truck, or van. Each child seat will have two standard buckles at its base. Every vehicle will be equipped with standard latches designed specifically to fasten to these buckles. There will also be universal attachments to secure the top of the child seat to the vehicle's interior, so child seats will be locked in from top to bottom.

Two rear seating positions will be required to have the universal attachment latches. If the vehicle has a method of deactivating the passenger side air bag -- a cutoff switch -- then one seating position in the front seat would be allowed to have the universal attachment points.

New child seats with the universal attachment system must also be capable of safe, secure installation in existing vehicles that do not have the attachment points.

When will the rule take effect?

The rule proposes to require the new systems as part of all new child safety seats and to be installed in all new motor vehicles two years after publication of the final rule. The detailed proposal will be published in the Federal Register during the week of February 17. There will be a 90 day comment period, and these comments will be included in the final rule as appropriate.

Why is NHTSA doing this?

Each year, crashes kill 600 children less than 5 years old. There are 70,000 non-fatal injuries annually in this age group. Forty percent of children are observed to ride completely unrestrained -- no child seats or belts at all. Child seat usage is high for infants, but drops off rapidly for older children.

Properly installed child seats are highly effective (70% for infants, 50% for toddlers) in reducing the chance of death and serious injury -- but in practice their effectiveness is considerably reduced because of problems fitting the seat to the vehicle. The difficulty of installing child seats leads to improper use. In fact, checkpoints have shown that up to 80 percent of child seats are misused. Tragically, there have been deaths because well-meaning people simply misunderstood how their seats should be attached. Understandably, parents and care givers are very dissatisfied with the current seats.

Why did NHTSA pick this particular system?

In February 1995, Secretary Peña and the administrator of NHTSA, Dr. Ricardo Martinez, convened a Blue Ribbon Panel of experts including automobile and safety seat manufacturers, and the medical and safety communities, to recommend ways to solve the problems associated with the

installation and use of child safety seats. The top recommendation was to come up with a uniform system of attaching child seats to motor vehicles. Many vehicle and child seat manufacturers in the U.S. and in other countries worked with NHTSA, culminating in a meeting with more than 100 participants in October, 1996. Focus groups and clinics helped the agency converge on the best solution -- easy-to-use "soft" or flexible attachment points with a top tether for increased safety.

What are the estimated benefits of the system?

The new universal attachment system will vastly reduce the difficulty and frustration owners have with current child seat designs. There will be corresponding gains in proper, effective use. NHTSA conservatively estimates that the proposed system itself will save 24 to 32 lives each year, and prevent up to 3,600 injuries.

What is the cost to the consumer?

NHTSA estimates that at the retail level, the new system will add about \$14 to the cost of a child safety seat. The added cost for a motor vehicle would be between \$4 to \$8.

This is for future vehicles -- what advice can you give parents now?

Just as with other products designed to protect children's health, the adults responsible must read instruction sheets diligently. Both the seat instructions and the motor vehicle manual must be carefully reviewed. Take note of how belts should be routed to hold the seat for optimum security. If additional hardware is supplied with the seat, learn how to attach and use it.

NHTSA operates a toll-free Hotline number, 1-800-424-9393. While NHTSA cannot provide instruction on individual seats, the agency can send helpful printed information and the contact phone numbers for manufacturers. Local hospitals can often provide information or referrals to child safety organizations.

What is DOT doing to stop air bags from killing and injuring children?

DOT has announced a seven step approach to reduce air bag dangers:

- new, bold warning labels in vehicles
- new warning labels on child safety seats
- phase-in schedule for the next generation or "smart" air bags
- extend time period for existing policy of permitting cut-off switches in vehicles with no rear seat
- allow manufacturers to take some power out of air bags
- allow owners of existing vehicles to have their air bags disconnected
- increase public awareness

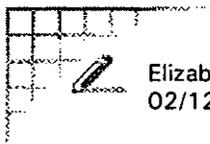
How does this rule relate to the Administration's efforts to improve airbag safety?

A significant part of the Administration's airbag safety effort involves educating the public about the need to always place children in the back seat and to make sure all occupants, including children, are properly restrained. In particular, infants in rear-facing infant seats can never be placed in front of a passenger airbag. Today's proposed rule provides that vehicles are to have child seat attachment points only in the rear seats. Attachment points are allowed in the front seat only if a vehicle has an airbag cutoff switch. These requirements will help guide parents to always place their children in a position that does not expose them to airbag risk.

The President also is using this opportunity to once again remind parents to make sure all children 12 and under are properly restrained in the back seat.

What are the Other Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations and NHTSA's Response to Them?

The Blue Ribbon Panel made 26 additional recommendations, the majority of which call for additional and better information to be made available to parents to help them choose the correct seat for their vehicle and child, and then install it correctly. NHTSA is pursuing the Panel's recommendations. NHTSA recently completed initial work on an interactive CD-ROM database which allows consumers to input information about their vehicle and their child's age and match it to an appropriate child seat. NHTSA will be making the database available to dealers in the near future after ongoing pilot testing is completed. NHTSA also just produced a video showing new parents how to transport their babies safely. The video, called "Protecting Your Newborn," will be available in hospitals, pre-birth classes, and many auto dealers.



Elizabeth Drye
02/12/97 07:43:18 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Michelle Crisci/WHO/EOP

cc: Bruce N. Reed/OPD/EOP, Elena Kagan/OPD/EOP

Subject: for you and Rahm -- WSJ running story tomorrow on child safety seats

NHTSA tells me the WSJ will run a story tomorrow on the child safety seat proposed rule we're announcing in the radio address Saturday. NHTSA expects the story to cover the content of the rule, note that it is at OMB for final approval, and state that it may be announced as soon as this week. The story probably will not say that the rule will be the topic of Saturday's radio address, but may beg the question. NHTSA's response to inquiries will be that the agency can't discuss the content of rules in rulemaking, has noted publicly it's working on such a rule, and can't discuss timing of its release. The 20 people we've invited to the address are not likely to be as discreet.