

SafetyBeltSafe News

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Tethers Are Better When Used

Safe Ride News and *SafetyBeltSafe* U.S.A. submitted joint recommendations for the National Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Board to consider in updating the national Certification curriculum. The letter pointed to the undoubted benefits of using top tether straps to reduce head excursion in crashes, especially in pickups and smaller vehicles, styles often owned by young parents. Head contact with hard surfaces is devastating, often leading to permanent brain damage.

With fewer safety seats with harnesses certified to 40 lbs. only, mandating 40 lbs. as the highest weight at which tether anchors are reliable requires scientific data, such as verified failures or definitive information from vehicle manufacturers. CPS advocates recommended using seats with harnesses longer, and manufacturers responded with a host of seats with harnesses certified as high as 90 lbs. In addition, both American Academy of Pediatrics and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have publicized their new policy recommendations on longer harness use.

A recent case highlighted another risk if tethers are not in use, sadly validating Technician calls for stowing everything.

A baby riding in a vehicle struck by another was seriously injured when the tether strap hook, still in a rubber band, left its imprint on her right eye, affecting her brain function as well. The risk may develop when the crash thrusts the seat forward, allowing the tether to fly up and over the safety seat back. This incident is a wake-up call for actual attachment to the safety seat to stow tether straps not in use.

Clearer Labels

Safe Ride News and *Evenflo* are jointly petitioning for improved regulated labeling of safety seats. Having identified two mandatory messages that regularly confuse both CPS Technicians and parents, they are submitting new wording with the support of cps advocates around the country.

One confusing label addresses the need for babies to remain rear facing for a specified period, using a weight not less than 20 lbs.; the other, the minimum/maximum weights for use of convertible and combination seats, includes only the minimum and maximum weights and heights, leading to parents' belief that some high-weight convertibles *must* be turned forward at 20 lbs., instead of 30-45 lbs. which are the current certified rear-facing weights. For combination seats, confusion leads to products being used with children in harness systems to the top weight listed which is intended for booster mode.

Labels using total height are not only misleading about how to assess child fit but also as children grow older, a statistic parents rarely know. In instructions, manufacturers often show drawings requiring that an inch of plastic is visible above the rear-facing child's head and that forward facing, children's shoulders are at or below the top harness level.

The proposal is to list rear facing until age 2 or as long as possible with a mandatory age of 1 as the least for forward facing. For multi-functional seats, the weight range for each mode would be specific with 20 lbs. listed as the minimum to ride forward facing. Height requirements would be handled by referring to the owner's manual.

To support the petition for NHTSA to review Section 5.5 of the FMVSS 213, go to saferidenews.com.

Thank You. . .

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Troubling Research Report from Transport Canada

Interactions of Rear Facing Child Restraints with the Vehicle Interior during Frontal Crash Tests, by Suzanne Tylko of Transport Canada, provides serious, but only initial, evidence to confound typical recommendations for placement of rear-facing safety seats and the tests used to certify products. The data were secured from 85 in-vehicle crash tests of 131 safety seats, primarily rear-facing-only with detachable bases. However, 19 were tested without bases, and 14 were convertibles. Vehicles were 48% passenger cars, 30% SUVs, and 11% minivans.

Although the majority of crash tests were within acceptable limits, five showed elevated dummy head contact with the seatback in front of the safety seat; two, with the carry handle behind the seat; eight, safety seat back with the vehicle seat back; and ten, the seat back with center console, for a total of 18% of the test crashes. How the dummy head/safety seat back struck the vehicle seat back had effects as well.

The study showed that resting the safety seat against the vehicle seat back was mitigating; however, owner's manuals of many vehicles now recommend against resting anything, including a kicking child's foot, against the back of the passenger front seat for fear of affecting the smart air bag readings so that no longer is being recommended. Another aspect of the testing is the greater forward movement seen when using the safety belt instead of LATCH. Some contacts involved the top of the dummy head but were less severe than others, into consoles or seat backs, that were direct strikes to the back of the head.

Mitigation appeared best for safety seats with energy-attenuating material in both the sides and back of the safety seat, reducing effects of head strikes. To date, both Canada and the U.S. require comfort foam, not the kind of liner in helmets. Moreover, the test sled has nothing in front for the safety seat to strike so that certification tests would not reflect differences in head protection. A high priority study is needed to identify the best type and thickness of the crash-absorbent material to require, given the high lifetime costs of head injury.

Tylko points to R. Refaat's May, 2010, NHTSA/National Center for Statistics and Analysis report detailing the greater incidence of head injury among those under age 1 compared with those up to age 7. This may link to the longtime recommendation of rear facing until age 1.

Since a large number of vehicles have center consoles and few feature center rear LATCH bars, center rear seating may be less protective than perceived. Moreover, if resting the seat against the seat back is recommended, moving the seat to the driver's side where no smart air bag exists may be preferred despite other issues. For instance, being able to check on a rear-facing child at a traffic stop will be more difficult; also the driver's seat is always occupied so in rear end collisions, there might be more loaded front seat backs impinging on the babies sitting behind them.

With Volvo seeking a change to the seat test buck (*see p. 4*), this might be the opportunity to add a "front seat and console" as well. Meanwhile, the industry can move forward with installing energy-absorbing liner to safety seats even before such a regulatory change can be enacted.

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New and Revised Product Information

Britax B-SAFE is a rear-facing-only seat for 4-30 lbs. with a 5-point harness, front adjuster strap, four sets of harness slots, and two crotch buckle positions. It has click-on lower LATCH connectors, removable padding for smaller babies, and a lockoff in the adjustable base.

Britax Frontier 85 SICT is a combination seat for 25-85 lbs. with harness and 40-120 lbs. as a booster. Like the Frontier 85, it has a 5-point, no-thread harness with front adjuster strap, click-on LATCH connectors, and a two-stage-release tether. The added feature is a set of side impact cushions on the outside of the seat. When used as a booster, this model is compatible with the Britax SecureGuard, which is designed to prevent the child from sliding under the lap portion of the belt in a crash to reduce the risk of abdominal injury.

Rear-facing tether kits are now available from **Combi** for the Coccoro.

Graco has clarified that their booster seats and combination seats used as boosters must not extend beyond the edge of the vehicle seat cushion. For seats with a harness, the Graco representative says to follow the 80-20 rule (at least 80% of the seat in contact with the vehicle seat cushion).

LIFESAVERS notes...

✓ *Teen Driver Errors Leading to Motor Vehicle Crashes*, by Allison Curry, PhD, MPH, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, was based on a national database of serious crashes with 15-18-year-old teen driver involvement. After in-depth analysis, poor surveillance ability, not reckless driving, was found to be the key factor for teens' over-representation.

✓ Determining best techniques for combining enforcement for belt use and reducing impaired driving prompted a study which looked at focused enforcement/publicity efforts in North Carolina and West Virginia, primary and secondary belt law states, and compared results between highly publicized night checkpoints and saturation patrols.

Night checkpoints had the greatest effect on increasing belt use and lowering alcohol levels, probably because the publicity surrounding the checkpoints reached more folks than encountered more police enforcing laws, according to David Preusser, who authored the study w/Solomon and Chaudhary.

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Volvo Petitions for Change

A Volvo Cars of North America petition is available in the Federal Register at www.regulations.gov as NHTSA-2011-0002. "The level of protection of children in traffic in Sweden has been recorded as the highest for any country in the world" due to the "key principle" that children should ride rear facing at least to ages 3-4, they write. Based on medical research related to astronaut protection in the 1960s, rear-facing travel avoids stress of high G-forces and pulling on the weak neck ligaments of children with their proportionally larger heads.

Volvo points to difficulty in testing products such as rear-facing seats equipped with a support foot resting on the vehicle floor, avoiding over-rotation. The antiquated test buck for FMVSS 213 has no floor on which to rest it and has the vehicle seat cushion of a '60s Chevy Malibu which is much softer than contemporary vehicle cushions which are designed to reduce occupant submarining.

Finally, Volvo asserts that most vehicles now have shoulder-lap belts, while the present regulation demands testing with lap-only belts & LATCH (except for boosters). Volvo contends that better outcomes would result from this revision in FMVSS 213, especially since countries using the ECE R44 standard developed in Europe can test on a sled buck with a floor, thus allowing for sale of such well-supported rear-facing seats other than in the U.S. The ECE test buck also has a shoulder-lap belt; Canada has joined the trend to accept shoulder-lap belt use for testing.

In Your Hands... Our Children's Safety

Responding to the sudden budget shortfall at SBS USA due to the hiatus of the CA Kids' Plates program, which canceled funding of \$160,000 for 20 months to conduct Model Cities programs in Los Angeles County, The Political Scientists, graphic artist Sue Black of rubudesign, and Unique Printing of Covina, California, have created a brochure describing SBS USA resources and seeking to bridge the funding gap.

Advisory Board members retired CA Highway Patrol (CHP) Commissioner D. O. "Spike" Helmick, national consumer advocate David Horowitz, and pediatrician Michael Sachs, MD, FAAP, are quoted. If you wish to help seek gifts for SBS USA, request the brochure.

The **Musk Foundation** has stepped in with a gift of \$10,000 to start the campaign. Founder of PayPal, SpaceX, and Tesla Motors, Elon Musk and wife Talulah make sure the twins and triplets in their family have safety seats for travel worldwide.

Calendar

Educator Workshop:

3 CEUs for CPST/CPSTI; 6 CEUs for nurses
9/15/11: 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Altadena, CA
Sponsors: CA Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and Glendora P D

Safety Seat Checkups: 10 am-2 pm, 9 am-3 pm for checkers.

9/24/11: Harbor-UCLA Med Center, Torrance, CA.
Sponsors: CA OTS, Glendora P D, and Harbor UCLA Med Ctr.
Oct, 2011: Watch www.carseat.org for details on this checkup in Irvine, CA. Sponsor: Toyota Material Handling

Sign up for the workshop or to volunteer as a checker at 310/222-6860 or sbsoffice2@aol.com