

SafetyBeltSafe News

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News from Lifesavers Conference, Orlando

■ Tethers Again!

Perhaps the most challenging issue from the standpoint of SBS USA has been the debate over the use of tether straps with heavier children. To date, no data have been offered to show failure of tether anchors in either the “real world” or in testing, while attached tether straps appear to reduce head excursion, reducing the chance of contact with the vehicle, and increase stability of forward-facing seats in side impacts. Moreover, the increasing number of forward-facing seats with harness certifications from 50-90 lbs. has raised dilemmas.

At Lifesavers, Chrysler Group LLC announced the results of their evaluation of the tether anchor capacity of their vehicles. All their vehicles can be used with the full LATCH system *or* safety belt and top tether until the combined weight of child and safety seat equals 65 lbs. However, Chrysler went further and tested many of their vehicles. For more than 30 models, over varying model years, the tether strap may continue to be used to the weight limit listed by the safety seat manufacturer when used with the safety belt. Among the models listed are family-focused minivans, the Town and Country, Voyager/Grand Voyager, and Dodge Caravan/Grand Caravan back to 2001 and the Jeep Grand Cherokee from 2005.

Finally, Audrey Eagle of Chrysler commended the Ford presentation of their policy in chart form in owner’s manuals and plans to adopt a similar format in future. Ford instructs as follows, where applicable: to 48 lbs. (for the child only) for rear-facing models with lower anchors only *or* safety belt

only; for forward-facing seats, with full LATCH *or* with the safety belt and tether *or* with full LATCH *and* safety belt. Forward-facing, seats for children weighing more than 48 lbs. may continue to be used with the tether strap so long as either the safety belt *or* LATCH *and* safety belt are used. If the safety seat manufacturer recommends use of the tether strap, Ford agrees.

Eleven other vehicle manufacturers are listed in the LATCH manual, compiled by Safe Ride News Publications, with a policy of following the safety seat manufacturers’ recommendations as far as tether use with lower anchors *or* safety belts. They are Infiniti, Jaguar, Land Rover, Lexus, Maserati, Mini, Nissan, Scion, Subaru (except 60 lbs. for LATCH, *or* 48 lbs. for lower anchors only for rear-facing), Toyota, and Volvo.

Impressed by these policies, SBS USA plans to list all of the Chrysler models with higher-weight use as well as the Ford chart at www.carseat.org. As there is additional clarification from other manufacturers, we gladly will add them as well.

■ Toyota/Lexus Tether Anchor Program through SBS USA is increasingly being used by families throughout the U.S. Residents of all states but HI may download and complete applications for the retrofitted anchors with the manufacturer covering dealer costs of both anchors and labor. It is possible for agencies to underwrite the \$5/donation/anchor to defray SBS USA costs on behalf of economically challenged families’ applications.

Calendar

■ CONFERENCE

* **8/16-18:** Kidz in Motion, Orlando, FL. Go to: www.kidzinmotion.org.

Register at 310/222-6860:

■ Educator Workshop

3 CEUs for CPST/CPSTI;
6 CEUs for nurses.

Sponsors: CA Office of Traffic Safety (OTS)/Pomona PD.

* **9/11:** Altadena, CA.

8:15 am-4:30 pm

■ Safety Seat Checkup:

10 am-2 pm, 9 am-3 pm for checkers.

* **9/22:** Harbor-UCLA Med Center, Torrance, CA. *Sponsors: CA OTS, Pomona PD, and Harbor UCLA Medical Center.*

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Technician Corner: *Aging and Safety Seats*

Companies are expanding the lifespan of many models as they extend the weight ranges for harness use. More seats are labeled for use to 7-10 years, at least in booster mode. Indeed, the original Evenflo Right Fit blow-molded boosters can be used even now so long as all of the original equipment is present.

Audrey Eagle of Chrysler explained that built-in seats are designed to the durability specifications of the vehicle itself and thus, there is no automatic cut-off for use. Still, such seats, and safety belts in use in a crash, must be inspected for damage by dealer service personnel and, if necessary, be replaced. Without plastic parts to degrade, the seats have long life spans.

Indiana Checkup News

Dorel Juvenile Group has a display of seats from the past, but staff noted one model was missing. When SBS USA coordinated a safety seat checkup at Dorel on behalf of sponsor Toyota Material Handling, U.S.A. (TMH), a child appeared using the elderly product! The theme for the checkup in Columbus, IN, was seats, damaged, too old, or inappropriate for the child, that were left behind, replaced by Dorel-donated products.

Fifteen TMH volunteers greeted 34 families, while 24 Dorel checkers worked with SBS USA reps Stephanie Tombrello and Karen Proctor to serve families eager to learn what would protect their 55 children.

When the day ended, 14 of 47 seats were replaced; all but one of the seats were corrected; and families drove home more safely.

Thank You

\$25,000 - State Farm Insurance
\$200 -

Bear Valley Community
Hospital/Mom/Dad Project
Glendale Memorial
Medical Center
San Luis Obispo Public
Health Department

Good News from Shasta County, CA!

Two charity events, reported by CPS Tech-Instructor Maureen Robison of SBS USA member Shasta Co. Public Health Dept, were covered in the *Record Searchlight* in 5/12 and 6/12. The May event, Project Homeless Connect, is a 1-day, multi-service offering which, this year, included providing 40 safety seats through Technician Jennifer Gideon and Maureen at the event.

A month later, the liability law firm of Reiner, Simpson, Slaughter and Wood offered free Britax Parkway boosters to all who asked. The event brought out 750 requests; by day's end, 530 had seats, and the rest were on order.

Maureen participated with California Highway Patrol officers who checked seats as well as fitting the boosters. The firm did not require proof of financial need; however, many participants indicated that job loss was a major factor in the requests.

The event also promoted knowledge of the improved CA law in effect since 1/1/12 which explicitly requires back seat travel and safety seat use to age 8 and continues to require correct belt fit regardless of age, meaning that most kids need boosters until ages 10-12.

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■ Hot-Button Issues

Last year at Lifesavers, a meeting of child passenger safety (CPS) advocates addressed issues which needed improved common messaging. After an active discussion, the conclusions were boiled down, and three critical pieces received the focus of three-person committees of diverse advocates to propose common threads.

Perhaps the most challenging was the tether. Data from Univ. of MI Transportation Research Institute showed that only Ford had charts in owner's manuals clearly delineating their policy. Studies on use of tethers have shown that a full 8-inch separation of anchor from safety seat back is needed to tighten the strap; sometimes this is provided by a tether strap path that leads it to a fabric loop to the side first before snapping on. The discussion recommended separate messages to Technicians and the public.

Safe Kids Worldwide was appalled by the low use of tethers (28%) reported from checkups conducted by their coalitions last year. So for 2012, they are promoting tether use; the slogan: Tethers Are Not Optional. This is important because research shows most parents believe they are.

Rear-facing travel for children up to at least age 2 was widely accepted; more parents are understanding this as so many safety seats are listing increased weights, as high as 45 lbs. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has split their message on the Web into a mandatory recommendation up to age 1 and then, for 1 to 3 year olds, a strong recommendation to keep children facing rear to the top rear-facing weight certified. SBS USA is trying to replace the term "infant-only" with rear-facing-only as the term for seats certified to face rear only because so many are certified to 30 lbs. or more, and the public usually doesn't refer to those over a year as infants. There is strong support for this.

The third category was how to present booster seat recommendations. NHTSA has now removed 4' 9" from its Web site. Data show that a standard height does not predict fit due to the diversity of proportions of vehicles as well as children. All are focused on belt fit approaches, whether or not the SBS USA 5-Step Test, offered in 2001 originally, is being used explicitly. The focus on belt fit means manuals from vehicle manufacturers that present fit tests and/or add information on what they are providing to help children to fit in their vehicles without add-on boosters can promote the effort. Weight remains a factor in choosing product for kids, not in determining how long to use boosters. More models are being certified to 110-125 lbs.

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■ Life Challenges and CPS

Lifesavers provided active discussion of DUI and Child Endangerment, a key issue for CPS advocates in order to make sure professionals who monitor families realize that this is a key problem for the minors involved. Children rarely can tell adults they won't get in a vehicle; they need built-in protections through mandatory plans and strategies to reduce their risk if forced into such circumstances. A fifth of child deaths in cars involve impaired drivers. The risks to children are higher in northern plains and southern states. Eight states do not include child endangerment charges for impaired drivers transporting kids. And in states with such laws, these charges are often the first to be dropped.

Experienced personnel shared the stresses of being on scene with an alleged violator with children along: whom to allow to take custody of the children; how to minimize the trauma of parental arrest; and even how to move the child from the scene, especially if safety seats are needed, since relatively few law enforcement agencies have definitive policies on use of alternative vehicles. Children lost in impaired-driver crashes usually are linked to higher blood alcohol levels in drivers and less restraint use. Most are riding with the impaired driver. Few impaired parents go so far as the dad who had his 9-year-old in her booster drive the vehicle; however, MADD reports that most impaired drivers make 200 trips before being apprehended!

Shortly after Lifesavers, the California Supreme Court sided with Los Angeles County social service personnel who removed a man's two sons from his custody when his 18-month-old daughter died, unrestrained, in a crash while seated in an aunt's lap. The girl had been injured in a fall at home and was being driven to a hospital by her dad when another driver ran a stop sign and hit their vehicle. The complicated family circumstances included evidence of neglect and poor parenting skills. The father made good use of offered parenting education and had already regained custody before the court decision. However, the judicial principles are that the death of the child does not have to be caused by abuse or criminal negligence nor does there have to be evidence that the fatal condition posed risk to the surviving children. In this case, however, there also was apparent neglect with poor mental and physical outcomes for both older and younger boys. Services offered were used to achieve improvement.

■ Vehicle Enhancements

Lifesavers panelists explored new ways to reduce risk without interfering with CPS needs. For instance, General Motors is introducing an air bag that deploys upright from the inside edge of the driver's seat in side-impact crashes to reduce the sideways travel of the driver in far-side impacts, absorb rebounds from near-side impacts, and, in the 25% of cases in which a front seat passenger is present, to reduce person-to-person impact.

When the technique was evaluated, Julie Kleinert of GM conducted many tests of out-of-position dummies, including a "10-year-old" lying on the center console and a side-facing passenger, as well as the effect on the most elongated rear-facing convertible in the center rear location, and found no untoward effects.

The new air bag will remain inflated a bit longer to protect in secondary rollovers due to these side impacts, reducing head injury by 90%.

(More on Lifesavers in our next issue.)