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Public Awareness Campaign Launched to Warn Parents about the Dangers of Leaving Children Unattended In Cars

May 20, 2004 (Las Vegas, NV) — Following a recent surge of disturbing incidents in which children are being left alone in vehicles, Kids And Cars and a coalition of southern Nevada businesses and community leaders today kicked off an aggressive public awareness campaign to educate and warn the public about the dangers of leaving children unattended in or around vehicles.

The launch of the campaign in Las Vegas and its surrounding communities will serve as a test market before launching a nationwide program.

At a news conference held today at Louis Wiener, Jr. Elementary School in Las Vegas, Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids And Cars, stressed the importance of legislation and public awareness to combat the growing problem of children being left unattended in or around vehicles.

"In several states, including Nevada, it is illegal to leave an animal unattended in a vehicle, but it is not illegal to leave a child," said Fennell. "Until legislation is passed to allow authorities to appropriately deal with adults that intentionally leave children alone in cars, it is important for leaders in the community to come together to educate the public about the serious dangers of leaving children unattended in or around cars."

State lawmakers have recognized the problem, but currently the only option law enforcement officers have are to charge parents with child endangerment or do nothing. Neither option appears to be working effectively. This campaign focuses on prevention.

Nevada State Senator Valerie Wiener said, "We crafted legislation in 2003 to protect the health and safety needs of children and to give law enforcement tools to ensure that adults would not endanger children by leaving them alone inside motor vehicles. We will continue to focus on these priorities in the legislation I plan to introduce in 2005."

The public awareness campaign will feature radio and television public service announcements, in Spanish and English, the distribution of car sunshades that display the campaign message, billboards, posters and window clings for local businesses, special milk carton labels featuring the group's "got kids?" message and special events being planned throughout the summer.

Car sunshades are a very key ingredient for this campaign and should be viewed as "billboards" in every parking lot and driveway in Clark County. According to Fennell, the car sunshades serve two purposes. Not only do they deliver a life-saving message when displayed in car windows, they also should be stored on the back seat of the car, so that each time a parent parks their car, the parent will look in the back to retrieve the sunshade. If a child is in the back seat, the parent will not forget, because he or she will see the child.

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The sunshades will be available with a small donation at the Fashion Show Mall on Saturday, May 29 and Sunday, May 30 in Court A. Additional outlets are to be announced.

Local real estate agent and grandmother, Kirby Presswood of Prudential Americana has generously offered to purchase the first 500 car sunshades and will make them available to any family that might not be able to donate to the cause, but would like to display the life-saving message in their vehicle.

As part of the campaign, Kids And Cars is also seeking the support and participation from local businesses to distribute car sunshades as well as display posters and window clings at various locations throughout the Las Vegas Valley.

"We need to get the message out to the entire community," said Jody Esposito, Las Vegas resident and vice president of Kids and Cars. "Businesses are encouraged to get involved."

Leaving Children Alone In or Around Cars Can Be Deadly

According to Fennell, while heat stroke is a primary concern in the summer, unattended children can also get into serious trouble around vehicles in numerous other ways, including putting the car into motion, being inadvertently kidnapped by car thieves, strangulation by power windows, getting trapped in the trunk and being backed over by adults who are driving the vehicle.

The Las Vegas community is no stranger to the tragedies that result from children being left alone in or around cars. According to data collected by Kids And Cars, 16 children have died as a result of incidents since 1996, with the most recent happening last weekend when an 18-month-old toddler was accidentally backed over by a minivan driven by his father.

In the summer of 2003, two local children succumbed to the heat as a result of being left unattended in vehicles.

A Continuing Problem

"We have seen several incidents in Clark County during the past few weeks where parents have left children alone in cars. We are very fortunate that none of these incidents have resulted in serious injury or death, but often times these incidents do result in the death of children," said Janette Fennell. "These incidents do serve as a reminder that the message of the dangers of leaving kids in cars is not getting through to the public."

In 2003, Las Vegas Fire & Rescue responded to 596 calls about children being left alone in vehicles (247 in the city of Las Vegas and 349 in North Las Vegas and unincorporated Clark County). As of May 13, in 2004 there have been 192 dispatch calls.

About The Campaign

This public awareness campaign is sponsored by Mainor Eglet Cottle Trial Lawyers, Smith's Food and Drug, Anderson Dairy, Rostra Precision Controls, Inc., HitchCAM and Kids And Cars, with support from Vons, Pop A Lock, AMR Ambulance, La Petite Academies, Nevada Attorney General's Office, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, Senator Valerie Wiener and Amazon Events.

Founded in 1996, Kids And Cars is a national nonprofit organization dedicated solely to the prevention of injuries and death to children. Kids And Cars stands for the right of every child to be protected from disability or death due to nontraffic, noncrash events in and around automobiles, and the right of every parent and caregiver to be free of worry and confident each child is protected from such sudden and preventable dangers. Kids And Cars is headquartered in Kansas City, Kansas. For more information, visit www.kidsandcars.org or call Janette Fennell at 913-327-0013 or Jody Esposito at (702) 497-0414.

Examples of auto sunshades in English and Spanish:

NEVER leave children alone
in or around cars




MAINOR EGLET COTTLE
THE COCHRAN FIRM
TRIAL LAWYERS

NUNCA deje niños sin supervisión dentro
o alrededor de los vehículos




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