

# Bensalem grandfather invents device to keep kids safe

## ***Bensalem resident invented child safety alarms***

By Gwen Shrift Staff Writer Calkins Media, Inc. Posted on June 12, 2012



*Bill Fraser / Staff Photographer Russell Rusakov of Bensalem has invented a safety alarm that signals when a child is left in a car. He is seen here demonstrating how a small transmitter clips onto the child seat in his car on Friday morning. Rusakov has also come up with devices that warn when kids get too close to a swimming pool and a blood-sugar alarm.*

The deaths of children in hot cars hit Russ Rusakov hard, especially when a 2-year-old boy died outside a day care center after being forgotten in a car in Pennel, not far from

Rusakov's home in Bensalem.

A different report got to him in a more personal way. A child death elsewhere occurred when a man accidentally left his own grandson in a vehicle.

Rusakov's daughter, Kristin Mascio, had just asked her newly retired dad to babysit her little boy, Joshua. Rusakov had raised four kids of his own, but the story about the grandfather and grandson haunted him.

"He went to work, forgot the child, the child perished," Rusakov recalled. "So I became very concerned about that." He resolved "to find a system that would prevent that from happening."

For 25 years until he retired, Rusakov operated Luria Visuals, a company that produced social and commercial videos. But by training, he's an engineer.



He used his technical skills to devise the Child Safety Seat Alarm System, which he makes in a facility in Philadelphia and markets online through his company, Suddenly Safe 'N Secure Systems Inc. The product line also includes anti-drowning and anti-wandering alarms and one that signals low blood sugar. The safety seat alarm links a small pressure-sensitive pad to a transmitter, which fastens to the side of the car seat.

A receiver attached to a keychain sounds an alarm — for hours, if need be — if the driver moves beyond a pre-set distance of 6 to 10 feet without disarming the device by taking the child out of the car seat. The system sells for \$79 for a model that arms itself automatically when the child sits on the pad. A version that can be turned on manually is \$59.

Rusakov launched the system in 2010 and said he was encouraged by feedback about the car seat alarm when he showed it at the 2011 National Conference on Highway Safety Priorities in Phoenix, Ariz.

The product also is featured on the Ray Ray's Pledge website founded by the parents of Sophia "Ray Ray" Cavaliero, a 1-year old girl from Austin, Texas, who died last year when her father accidentally left her in a hot car. Rusakov donates a portion of the sale of each seat alarm to the organization.

Rusakov said he has sold between 400 and 500 units a year since his alarm debuted. He said sales would be higher if not for parent/caregiver denial.

"People think it can't happen to them," he said. "We have to break that barrier."

KidsAndCars.org, a nonprofit child safety organization based in Leawood, Kan., sees that kind of denial on a larger scale, according to Amber Rollins, executive assistant to the group's president.

"One of the things that we feel is a problem with aftermarket technology is that nobody thinks that this is going to happen to them, so parents aren't going to buy something that they don't think they're going to need," she said.

Alarm devices are "a 100 percent must. It's absolutely something that's needed, and those parents who realize that this can happen to even the best of parents will buy them. And it's important," she added.

Rollins said KidsAndCars.org doesn't endorse products, but is lobbying to require child safety devices to be built into new vehicles, including alarm systems that alert a driver if a child is left behind. "Even when it is required, there will be vehicles on the road for years that don't have that technology," she said.

According to Safe Kids USA, a nonprofit group that targets preventable injuries, 228 children died since 1998 because they were forgotten in cars. (When accidental or intentional lock-ins are factored in, the death toll is 500.)

The statistics on child death by drowning are even more horrific. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drowning is the second-highest cause of "unintentional injury death" for children ages 1 to 14.

From living part of the year in Rotonda, Fla., a state where drowning is a major problem in the pools, lakes, ponds, ocean and canals, Rusakov became attuned to water dangers. When he heard the statistics on child drownings, he decided that "something's gotta be done about this."

He designed a system in which a locked wristband activates a 100-decibel alarm and a flashing light when immersed in water. The Safety Angel model, for \$129, works for water and can also be set to go off when a child moves a certain distance away — particularly helpful in crowded settings. It is set up for a maximum of two children.

A related anti-drowning product, The Child Guard system (\$119), can be used with multiple wristbands (\$19.95 each) and also can be set to monitor a distance up to 200 feet. "I think you're going to see that a lot in camps and in schools," Rusakov said.

The business takes up quite a bit of time that many retired grandfathers, including Rusakov, would otherwise spend playing golf. He chose to cut back on his game in favor of making and marketing safety alarms.

"I thought this was more important," he said. "We think it's like a smoke alarm. Boy, you hope you never need it, but if you do ..."

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