

## If Cars Can Monitor Left-On Headlights and Rear Obstructions, They Should Be Able To Save Trapped Kids' Lives

[Susan Pepperdine](#) 5:05 PM ET July 29, 2014

**Today, technology saves your car battery—tomorrow, it could save your child**

Thursday is [National Heatstroke Prevention Day](#), so here is a little fact for your awareness: In the past 20 years more than 670 U.S. children have died of heatstroke in hot cars. To date this year [KidsAndCars.org](#) has recorded 18 such fatalities, including the [death last week](#) of a 10-month-old girl in Wichita, Kansas, who was unknowingly left in a vehicle on a 90-degree day.

Our national advocacy nonprofit works year-round to educate parents and caregivers about these dangers, including a nationwide “Look before you lock” program. But education is not enough when all it takes is a simple change in a daily routine to cause a parent to drive past their childcare center and forget their child in the back seat. Current state laws require putting your baby in a rear-facing child safety seat, which has saved the lives of thousands of children in car crashes. An unintended consequence of this shift is that when out of sight, quiet little unobtrusive passengers can slip out of mind.

How can we prevent this failure of memory? The auto industry obviously recognizes that we’re human and our memories often fail us: our cars are able to warn us if we leave our headlights on, our keys are in the ignition, a door is open, we’re low on fuel, if our seatbelt isn’t buckled... If we can monitor our headlights or gas levels, we should be able to get a signal that a child has been forgotten.

Some of the [technology options](#) currently on the market include car seat monitors and alert systems, key fobs connected to car seats that sound a reminder and weight-sensitive mats. One system activates when the driver has opened the back door to strap in the car seat, and then sounds a reminder chime when the driver leaves the vehicle. Mobile apps have hit the market, such as Cars-n-Kids Carseat Monitor, which connects with the carseat via a sensor, or the Amber Alert GPS, which tracks your child in or out of the car.

These after-market systems may be useful reminders to some people, but they have not all been tested, and they are not the failsafe solution we need in every vehicle. Furthermore, a [2012 study](#) on “Evaluation of Reminder Technology” sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and conducted by the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia found that a few of these systems were not always reliable.

Safety is something every family deserves. It shouldn’t be optional, like 4WD or leather seats. And it shouldn’t be political. The federal government and automakers along with safety advocates have the ability to solve this problem. KidsAndCars.org [recently launched](#) a petition to push the Obama Administration to authorize the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide funding for research and development of innovative technologies to detect a child left alone in the rear seat of a vehicle, such as infrared breathing sensors (a technology that already exists in [certain baby monitors](#) for the home). We also spearheaded an initiative to adopt federal safety standards that require all vehicles to be equipped with trunk release latches to prevent trunk entrapment, safer power window switches to prevent strangulation, and brake transmission shift interlock systems so children cannot inadvertently knock a vehicle into gear. In March, the DOT [issued a rule](#) requiring rear visibility systems, such as cameras, as standard equipment on all new passenger vehicles by May 2018.

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*Susan Pepperdine is the public relations director of KidsAndCars.org, a national nonprofit group dedicated to preventing injuries and deaths of children in and around motor vehicles.*

<http://time.com/3003067/heatstroke-child-deaths-hot-cars/>