

Administration sued over backup camera delay

Fred Meier and Chris Woodyard, USA TODAY 8:20 a.m. EDT September 26, 2013



(Photo: Robert Hanashiro USAT)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Law directed Transportation Department to have backup camera rules in place by 2011**
- **But none have been implemented**
- **Coalition of car-safety advocates, parents suing Obama administration over issue**

As a toddler, Patrick Ivison was holding his mother's hand as they strolled through a San Diego parking lot. They were only a step or two from being clear of a Ford Escort — but it suddenly backed up.

The bumper knocked Ivison in the head and pulled him underneath, causing a spinal injury that left him a quadriplegic. In that instant, Ivison, now 19, became one of hundreds of kids killed or hurt by drivers who didn't see them when backing up.

Yet six years after Congress passed a law — a 2007 act named for a child killed in such an incident — ordering the Transportation Department to have a rule in place by 2011 to require cameras or other backup warning devices on all new cars and light trucks, there have been multiple delays and no regulation is in place.

To try to break through the bottleneck, a coalition of car-safety advocates and parents sued the Obama administration on Wednesday. Two parents who accidentally backed over their kids were the lead plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York.

"It's way long overdue," says Ivison, a film student at the University of Southern California. "Every day that it's not in place, another two kids get hit."

[In a 2010 report, the DOT's](#) National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said that each year 228 people die in light-vehicle backup incidents, with about 44% of them kids under age 5. The second most vulnerable group: adults over age 70.

If the initial 2011 deadline in the law had been met, the phase-in would have had backup warning devices on all new cars and SUVs by 2014 models. The law did not require backup cameras, but they have become the dominant solution as costs dropped.

NHTSA estimated in 2010 that backup cameras would add \$53 to \$88 to the price of cars with dash display screens (which even many economy small cars now have) and \$159 to \$203 for vehicles without them.

On Tuesday, NHTSA said it is adding the cameras to its "recommended" features for new cars. But advocates such as Scott Michelman of Public Citizen, a group in the lawsuit, say, "A recommendation is no substitute for a mandate."

The Transportation Department has told Congress it now hopes to have the delayed regulation by 2015.

Calling the delays "outrageous and unacceptable," Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said in a statement Wednesday that "rear cameras should become standard on all cars just as seat belts and airbags" are.

The delays have come even as rear visibility has declined. Some of that has been a side effect as automakers have shortened and thickened pillars to meet to new rollover standards and made windows smaller to cut fuel-sapping weight. But it also is due to the popularity of higher vehicles that give drivers a commanding view of surrounding traffic at the cost of a big tailgate blind zone.

"No matter what you drive, whether it's a station wagon, minivans or giant honkin' SUV, you can't see what's behind you," says Amber Rollins, director of Kids and Cars, also a party in the suit. "It's terrifying."

Some automakers aren't waiting, and cameras are moving from pricey cars to mainstream. A majority of 2013 model cars and light trucks -- 53% -- have a standard backup camera, says Aaron Lewis of auto research and shopping site Edmunds.com. And 79% have one available, standard or as an option.

Most aggressive has been Honda, which will meet the 2014 goal. All 2014 model-year Honda and Acura passenger vehicles will have rearview cameras standard, says spokesman Chris Naughton. The last without was the 2013 Fit subcompact -- Honda's smallest model -- which gets a camera for 2014.

That may turn out to be smart marketing. "For many consumers backup cameras have reached the same status as air conditioning or cruise control," says Karl Brauer, senior analyst at car research site Kelley Blue Book. "While not standard on every car ... these features have become so common that drivers are surprised and disappointed when a vehicle doesn't have them."

He notes that unlike AC or cruise "there's a certifiable safety benefit to backup cameras. ... It's time for backup cameras to be a required feature on all new cars sold in the U.S."

Also parties in the lawsuit are two parents, including Greg Gulbransen, a pediatrician in New York, who backed up over his young son in 2002. The 2007 law was named for his son, Cameron. He [wrote an op-ed piece for the Washington Post today](#) to call attention to the delays and the lawsuit.

And other groups include Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety and Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy of *Consumer Reports*.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/cars/2013/09/25/backup-cameras-dot-lawsuit-gulbransen-obama-administration/2870819/>