



## NEWS RELEASE

KidsAndCars.org

<http://www.kidsandcars.org/>

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## New report undercounts statistics regarding children left behind in hot cars

**September 6, 2009** - The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) released its first-ever "Not-in-Traffic Surveillance 2007 - Children" report on Tuesday, conclusively confirming that preventable deaths and injuries associated with motor vehicles happen with regularity every year, not only on public roadways, but on private driveways and in parking lots. The safety agency report estimates that thousands of tragic and life-altering incidents occurred in 2007 due to children being backed over, powerful automatic vehicle windows closing on necks and limbs of car occupants and by children being left alone in hot vehicles.

Janette Fennell, founder and president of KidsAndCars.org, the national nonprofit organization advocating for child and automotive safety said, "This is an important day, one that has been long overdue. The release of this report solidifies once and for all that attention must be focused on making cars safer for children....no matter where an incident takes place. These data confirm what parents and safety groups have known for years . . . that too many children are being killed in their own driveways and parking lots by the very people who love them the most and nothing was being done to prevent these needless tragedies."

Though NHTSA's report correctly identifies heat stroke (hyperthermia) as the number one cause of death when children are left alone **inside** motor vehicles; their data seriously undercounts the actual number of children who die in this manner. Their message is correct; but the data appear to be understated. "Our data confirms an average of 37 hyperthermia fatalities per year; not the 27 estimated by the agency" states Fennell.

It's important for the public to clearly understand the magnitude of this issue. One child dies every 10 days in this country due to vehicular hyperthermia.

The release of the NHTSA report is very timely because parents need factual information about ways to protect their children this summer. Already, six children have perished due to heat stroke this year; with two in the last two days. An inquisitive toddler died after entering his mother's vehicle in Rhode Island and a 4-monthold infant perished in California after his father unknowingly forgot to drop him at daycare.

Numerous solutions exist today to help prevent these tragedies and KidsAndCars.org hopes the government will work diligently and as quickly as possible to put the regulations and education programs in place to make these types of injuries and deaths a thing of the past.

KidsAndCars.org is proposing Federal legislation that would help to save the lives of thousands of children and put an end to children being unintentionally left behind in a motor vehicle. The legislation would require automakers to install seat belt sensors (like the ones already found in the driver's and front passenger seats) for all rear seating positions. Rear seatbelt sensors would let the driver know that everyone in the back seat is buckled up; or when a passenger unbuckles themselves. Statistics confirm that 40-50% of children who die in auto crashes are not buckled and this legislation would save thousands of lives.

Once the sensors are required, it would be very easy to program the sensors and/or seatbelts to alert a driver that someone is still in the vehicle when they are locking their vehicle. This would be similar to the warning we receive when we've left our keys in the ignition or headlights on. This strategy should be effective because data tells us that many people feel something like this "could never happen to them" and may not think they need to purchase aftermarket technology. However, these types of incidents do not discriminate. The biggest challenge we face is to help people understand that given the right set of circumstances, this can happen to anyone.

Passage of the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act in 2007 was the pivotal moment in changing how our society thinks about these terrible events. Signed by the President in February 2008, this is the only Transportation bill passed in this country since 2005. This legislation, among other key provisions, directed NHTSA for the first time to collect data about motor vehicle incidents that take place off the public roads and highways.

For additional information regarding the significant dangers children face in and around motor vehicles, visit [www.KidsAndCars.org](http://www.KidsAndCars.org)

NHTSA "Not-in-Traffic Surveillance 2007 - Children" report: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811116.PDF>  
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### **KidsAndCars.org recommendations to keep children safe include:**

- Never leave children alone in or around cars; not even for a minute
- Put something you'll need like your cell phone, handbag, employee ID, lunch or brief case, etc., on the floor board in the back seat. Get in the habit of always opening the back door of your vehicle every time you reach your destination to make sure no child has been left behind. This will soon become a habit. We call this the "Look before you lock campaign."
- Keep a large teddy bear in the child's car seat when it's not occupied. When the child is placed in the seat, put the teddy bear in the front passenger seat. It's a visual reminder that anytime the teddy bear is up front you know the child is in the back seat in a child safety seat.
- Make arrangements with your child's day care center or babysitter that you will always call them if your child will not be there on a particular day as scheduled. This is common courtesy and sets a good example that everyone who is involved in the care of your child is informed of their whereabouts on a daily basis. Ask them to phone you if your child doesn't show up when expected. Many children's lives could have been saved with a telephone call from a concerned child care provider. Give child care providers all your telephone numbers, including that of an extra family member or friend, so they can always confirm the whereabouts of your child.
- Use drive-thru services when available. (restaurants, banks, pharmacies, dry cleaners, etc.)
- If you see a child alone in a vehicle, get involved. If they are hot or seem sick, get them out as quickly as possible. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.
- Keep vehicles locked at all times; even in the garage or driveway and always set your parking brake.
- Keys and/or remote openers should never be left within reach of children.
- Make sure all child passengers have left the vehicle after it is parked.
- Be especially careful about keeping children safe in and around cars during busy times, schedule changes and periods of crisis or holidays.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.
- Use your debit or credit card to pay for gas at the pump.
- Walk around and behind a vehicle prior to moving it.
- Know where your kids are. Make children move away from your vehicle to a place where they are in full view before moving the car and know that another adult is properly supervising children before moving your vehicle.
- Teach children that "parked" vehicles might move. Let them know that they can see the vehicle; but the driver might not be able to see them.
- Consider installing cross view mirrors, audible collision detectors, rear view video camera and/or some type of back up detection device.

- Measure the size of your blind zone (area) behind the vehicle(s) you drive. A 5-foot-1-inch driver in a pickup truck can have a rear blind zone of approximately 8 feet wide by 50 feet long.
- Be aware that steep inclines and large SUV's, vans and trucks add to the difficulty of seeing behind a vehicle.
- Hold children's hand firmly when leaving the vehicle.
- Teach your children to never play in, around or behind a vehicle.
- Keep toys and other sports equipment off the driveway.
- Homeowners should trim landscaping around the driveway to ensure they can see the sidewalk, street and pedestrians clearly when backing out of their driveway. Pedestrians also need to be able to see a vehicle pulling out of the driveway.

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**About KidsAndCars.org:** Founded in 1996, KidsAndCars.org is a national nonprofit child safety organization dedicated to preventing injuries and deaths of children in and around motor vehicles. KidAndCars.org promotes awareness among parents, caregivers and the general public about the dangers to children, including backover and frontover incidents, and heatstroke from being inadvertently left in a vehicle. The organization works to prevent tragedies through data collection, education and public awareness, policy change and survivor advocacy.