

BABBLING BROOK: Children are dying; we bailed out automakers, now we should demand back-up cameras/sensors on all cars

Brook Stockberger/Sun-News Business Editors/lcsun-news.com Posted: 03/01/2012 01:52:36 PM MST



Auto safety groups are pushing for all cars to have back-up cameras to try and prevent... (AP photo)

Have you ever started to back up your vehicle and then caught movement in your rearview mirror? Maybe a person darting behind you, or another car backing out at the same time in a parking lot? Me too.

Such a situation can sure get your heart beating and the near miss, whether it would be your fault or not, affects you with thoughts of what might have happened.

Thousands of people are killed or injured each year because they were backed over by a car. Nearly half the deaths involve children younger than 5. That's why, in 2008, Congress passed a law setting up new, rear-visibility standards in the form of cameras and sensors that can beep. The government reports that the systems are expected to add about \$200 to the cost of each new vehicle, or even as low as \$58 if the vehicle already has a built-in GPS screen.

Fast forward four years, and the auto industry has not implemented the technology in all cars and has asked the government for more time to explore cheaper options - like bigger mirrors. The government has said "OK."

Now, I am not one of those people who think all big industry is evil. Companies big and small and their workers are, of course, the backbone of our economy. Companies need to turn a profit and are always looking for ways to do so.

Is \$200 or less per car, though, that large of a burden? That cost pales in the cost of a new vehicle and would be passed on to the customer anyway. Trust me, I know that 200 bucks is a lot of many to many people - including me - but compared to the price of a new car, it is a drop in the bucket. If it saves the life of even one person, I believe the price would be worthwhile. In fact, the back-up system is already used as a selling point for the cars that do have such a system, which can deliver the buyer from incidents like smacking a fender into a post or another car.

The Associated Press reports that already about 45 percent of 2012 model cars have rearview cameras as standard equipment, according to KidsAndCars.org, a safety group that championed the passage of the 2008 law. The cameras are an option on an additional 23 percent of models.

In a majority of back-over accidents in which children were killed, the driver was a family member, according to KidsAndCars.

"The emotional tragedy is off the Richter scale," said Janette Fennell, president and founder of the group.

Lobbyists for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, though, have urged the Obama administration to permit manufacturers the option of meeting the proposed visibility standard through expanded mirrors on vehicles rather than cameras. The lobbyists report that the cost to the industry of requiring cameras is \$2.7 billion annually. They said allowing automakers to meet the standard with mirrors instead would cost about \$1 billion.

But, come on, expanded mirrors, really?

I do think the government can - and has - overstep its bounds. There is such a thing as personal freedom and personal responsibility. Still, now is the time to push for all cars to have these back-up cameras and sensors. Not everyone was thrilled with the idea of all cars being required to have seat belts either. Now we take it for granted.

Since our tax money went to bail out much of the domestic auto industry, I say it is time for us to demand these systems be added to all vehicles. The current average price of a new car is about \$25,000, The Associated Press reports. Would \$25,200 really be such a burden?

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