

# Experts: Child hot-car deaths more common than expected

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INDIANAPOLIS – The news that two parents in separate central Indiana incidents left their young child in a sweltering vehicle during a record heat wave has stirred outrage, but national child car-safety advocates say that, in reality, it happens more often than people realize and it happens to all kinds of parents.

On Saturday, a 4-month-old girl died in Greenfield and a 16-month-old girl in Fishers suffered a seizure and was in critical condition after being left locked in stifling hot cars.

Right before he left for his parents' home on Saturday afternoon, 18-year-old Joshua Stryzinski helped change his 4-month-old daughter into a one-piece outfit. It left her legs and arms exposed, a way to help keep her cool in the triple-digit heat.

He arrived to a busy home in Greenfield, Ind., his brother outside painting and the family preparing to go on vacation. He chatted with his father, Ronald, about maybe buying a car from him. About a couple of hours later, he realized it was time to pick his baby's mother up from her shift at Arby's.

When he got back to his 2002 Saturn SL1, the doors closed and the windows rolled up, he screamed when he realized what was inside — his daughter. He ripped her out and rushed her inside, still in her car seat.

She wasn't breathing. Joshua's father tried [CPR](#) as they rushed her to the hospital, only a block or two away.

But it was too late. Emergency-room doctors pronounced her dead. Her arms and legs had suffered third-degree burns.

These details emerged Monday in a [911](#) call and police probable-cause affidavit used to charge Stryzinski with neglect of a dependent leading to death. He has pleaded not guilty and was released from Hancock County Jail on Monday afternoon on a \$50,000 cash bond.

On the same day Stryzinski's infant daughter died, 30-year-old Meg Trueblood was shopping at a clothing store while her 16-month-old was in a locked car in the parking lot. That child suffered a seizure and was taken to the hospital but survived. Trueblood also has been charged with neglect of a dependent.

Janette Fennell tracks these cases as the president and founder of KidsAndCars.org. She says that perhaps 90% of the time, the parent is the type to put latches on their doors and padding around the coffee table.

She has met college professors, lawyers and ministers who have done it. Only a small percentage, she said, have drug problems or have had interactions with child protective services. "It's the exact opposite of the stereotype," she said.

Several who knew the Stryzinskis said they left no impression that they were anything but upstanding citizens.

"This is a good family that has lost a child they loved," said 39-year-old next-door neighbor Cherie Sirosky.

The 911 call — made by Stryzinski's brother and with audible screaming and wailing in the background — captures a family overcome with grief, desperation and panic.

Attempts to reach the Stryzinskis at their home Monday were unsuccessful.

Stryzinski had stopped at a friend's home en route to his parents' home to show the baby to the friend's parents, but apparently got confused and thought he had left the baby with the friend.

He told police he could not believe his daughter was in the car.

"The normal routine," Stryzinski told police, "is that someone is always watching my kid."

Statistically, what Stryzinski described fits what typically happens in such cases, according to the organization [Safe Kids Worldwide](#).

The organization has been tallying fatal incidents where children have been left in cars since 1998. They count 550 cases nationwide where a child has died from hyperthermia or heat stroke while in a car. In 2010, at least 51 children died; in 2011, there were 33. The children have ranged in age from 5 days to 14 years old, though more than half of the dead are 2 years old or younger.

Of those cases, 52% of the parents didn't realize they had left the children there; 17% left the kids there knowingly. In 30% of the cases, the child managed to get into the car alone.

But how does it happen? How does a parent forget his or her child?

Kate Carr, president and CEO of Safe Kids Worldwide, said so many factors can contribute to such a scenario — a change in routine, stress, lack of sleep. That might be especially true with a young, new parent.

"We can't rush to judgment," Carr said.

If Stryzinski simply forgot or became confused, less is known about the mother in the Fishers case.

Police detained Trueblood, 30, but records released to the media do not say what she told police as to why she left the child there.

According to police reports, Trueblood was shopping at Simply Chic clothing store in Fishers, leaving her 16-month-old in the back of her silver 2004 [Ford Explorer](#).

A Simply Chic customer had noticed the child in the parking lot and returned inside to tell the store's manager. The customer and manager went outside, noticed the windows were up, tried to open the door — it was locked — and eventually called 911.

A police officer who responded tried to locate the child's mother, then smashed the window in. He carried the child, limp and unconscious, inside the store.

Employees wetted some fabric and started blotting her body with it. The police officer tried unsuccessfully to get her to drink some water. As medics arrived, she began to convulse.

At some point while the officer was caring for the baby, Trueblood identified herself as the girl's mother.

A store employee told police, though, she had arrived at the store about an hour before the police did, saying she wanted to find a dress because she was about to go and meet a guy. The employee said she was sure Trueblood had never left the store.

A Fisher's police spokesman told *The Star* on Saturday that it didn't appear the woman was coherent, but there was no mention of that in the police report.

When investigators measured the temperature inside the Ford Explorer it was 120 degrees.

Trueblood was charged with neglect resulting in serious bodily injury and taken to Hamilton County Jail, where she was released on bond.

Stryzinski also faces a neglect charge, though if convicted, he perhaps faces a worse sentence. In Indiana, the neglect charges make for a [Class B](#) felony if the child is seriously harmed and a [Class A](#) felony if the child dies.

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/story/2012-07-10/hot-cars-children-deaths/56125706/1>