Safety Push After 8 Kids Die In Hot, Parked Cars

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (WUSA) -- They were snapped into car seats and carted away to places with the people who loved them most. Then, the unthinkable happened. All of them died when they were accidentally left behind in a hot, parked car.

"I opened the backdoor of my SUV to put my laptop down and that's the moment I will never forget," says Reggie McKinnon, who lost his daughter back in March of 2010. McKinnon found his 17 month old daughter, Payton, dead in her car seat after a long, busy day on the job.

"It was the last thing I remember, I heard someone screaming. It was me," recalls McKinnon.

He'd forgotten to drop Payton off at her daycare after a doctor's appointment. And, says he is still troubled by one heartwrenching and unanswered question:

"How did I forget my child?"

Baby Payton was one of at least 49 children who died back in 2010 - which according to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood - is the worst year on record for children who succumbed to the deadly combination of searing heat and being left alone in a car.

Doctors say heatstroke occurs when the body can't cool itself fast enough. Children's bodies heat up 4 to 5 times faster than adults.

"Today we are focusing on a danger that is a hundred percent preventable. 100 percent preventable," says Transportation Secretary Ray La Hood.

So, the Department of Transportation and Health and Human Services are teaming up to try and spread the message to parents and caregivers to "look before you lock."

In a government demonstration today, emergency personnel illustrated how when it's 124 degrees outside, it's 124 inside a car.

Reggie McKinnon plans to continue to travel the country sharing his story in hopes that it spares another family before it's too late.

"I made a promise to my sweet Payton, that I would do everything I could to prevent this from happening to another child."

So what can YOU do to protect your children? According to the safety group, Kids and Cars:

- Put something in the back seat so you have to open the door when leaving the vehicle - cell phone, employee badge, handbag, etc.
- Every child should be correctly restrained in the back seat.
- Stuffed animal - Move it from the car seat to the front seat to remind you when your baby is in the back seat.
- Ask your babysitter or child-care provider to call you within 10 minutes if your child hasn't arrived on time.
- Focus on driving. Avoid cell phone calls and texting while driving.
- Make it a rule, every time you park your vehicle open the back door to make sure no one has been left behind.
- Make sure you never leave a child unattended in a car. Even for a minute.

And, if you see a child alone in a parked car call 911. It might just save a life.

Here are some other resources to help you, keep children safe.
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Safe Kids
Kids and Cars

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