

Help for the Child Left Behind

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TOMY International The IAlert car seat notifies a caretaker when a child has been left inside a parked car.

Children dying of hyperthermia after being left in parked cars has long been a problem, but a new child safety seat may help solve it.

The [IAlert car seat](#), developed by Tomy International in partnership with [Cars-n-Kids](#) of St. Louis, can send a message to a caretaker's smartphone when a child is left in the seat after the vehicle has stopped and can also send a notification if the child gets out of the seat while the vehicle is moving.

It's been more than four years since "[Fatal Distraction](#)," a Pulitzer Prize-winning article by Gene Weingarten in The Washington Post Magazine, drew attention to the frequency of hyperthermia deaths after children are left alone in cars. In [an article I wrote in May 2010](#), I reported that technical solutions appeared to be possible, while noting the reluctance of the auto industry to implement them. The feasibility of a system that could detect the presence of a child and send a message to the caretaker had been demonstrated by a number of parties, including a group of NASA engineers.

Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids and Cars, an automotive safety advocacy group, said in a telephone interview that 23 children had died this year and more than 600 in the last decade.

"When we're dealing with a situation where our brains and our memory can let us down at the most inopportune time, technology can help," she said. "We've been waiting 10 years for a technical solution. This appears to be it. And because it offers other features in addition to the reminder to take your child, it will appeal to those who mistakenly believe they could never forget."

Jennifer Pondel, brand director at Tomy International, said that sensors in the seat could detect the presence of a child weighing 5 to 65 pounds. An electronic module sends alerts to a smartphone via Bluetooth. If the caretaker does not respond to the alert, the module will send e-mail and text messages to as many as 12 addresses or phone numbers that have been entered by the caretaker. These messages are delivered through the cellular network.

The seat can be installed as a rear-facing infant seat or a front-facing toddler seat. The smartphone app is free and available for most [Android](#) phones and [iPhones](#). The app can also measure seat angle to assist with rearward-facing installation and monitors the temperature in the back seat, where, under most states' laws, it must be mounted.

The car seat is available from Amazon.com for \$350.

<http://wheels.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/help-for-the-child-left-behind/? r=0>