

PRO/CON VIEW: Should the federal government require backup cameras in all new vehicles?

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OUR VIEW: LET CONSUMERS, MARKET DECIDE THIS

The death of a child in a back-over vehicle accident is an unspeakable tragedy, a nightmarish possibility that haunts countless parents. But it should not cause the federal government to mandate backup cameras on all new cars and trucks. That's a decision that should be left to consumers and the free market.

Consumer advocates and parents who have accidentally backed over their children plan to sue the federal government to require this change.

Yet many high-end vehicles already have these cameras, and the trend will likely increase in future years. But the cameras would add considerable cost to lower-end models. Over time, these safety add-ons and others effectively price many consumers out of the market for a new car.

Back-over accidents can usually be prevented the old-fashioned way, by a driver looking carefully and making sure that no one is behind his vehicle. Better technology always helps, but the focus must remain on personal responsibility.

ANOTHER VIEW: STOP DITHERING, START SAVING LIVES

The opponents of mandatory backup cameras don't seem to realize how effective they are. They can show a small child who would not be visible in a rear-view mirror. These cameras, especially when coupled with audio warning, can literally be life-savers.

It's time to require them on all new vehicles instead of waiting for manufacturers to slowly come around. That's the same approach that put seat belts and safety glass in all vehicles instead of hoping that carmakers would voluntarily do the right thing.

The cameras would cost only a few hundred dollars per vehicle. In addition to saving children, they would also prevent many drivers from backing over bicycles, trash cans, etc. That's a real savings to consumers that can offset the upfront costs.

Back-over deaths are not inevitable. More of them can be prevented now if the federal government has the will. Congress should require the cameras if this lawsuit doesn't succeed.

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