

Campaign warns parents never to leave a child in a hot car

By ERIC ADLER, The Kansas City Star Posted on Wed, Aug. 22, 2012 11:22 PM

A new strategy in KCK: breakfast in the classroom Todd Akin calls for help to save his Senate candidacy KC police investigate detective's Florida trip in department car Mail carrier's death in July added to heat's toll Police impersonator on the prowl Campaign warns parents never to leave a child in a hot car Next KC streetcar election will again be by mail Grass fires claim more acreage in KC area Kansas anti-gang efforts get influx of resources Photos at DUI checkpoints will highlight victims KC teen convicted of killing Prospect Avenue business owner The point was to show the kind of heat that each year kills dozens of children left inside of boiling cars.

At Children's Mercy Hospital, as part of a new national campaign to prevent deaths to kids in cars from heatstroke, a Chevy minivan fixed with two digital temperature gauges sat parked in the sun at the hospital's entrance Wednesday. One gauge read the outside temperature. The other read the inside heat.

Within 45 minutes, as Kansas City's outdoor ambient temperature slowly climbed from 84 degrees to 88, the vehicle's inside became a searing hotbox: 122 degrees, then 125, then at noon the temperature was a sizzling 135 degrees and still climbing.

In the first seven days of August, eight children nationwide died from heatstroke after inadvertently being left in car seats, the most vehicle child heatstroke deaths ever for such a short period, the administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in Kansas City.

"We have lost 23 babies (nationally) this summer to heatstroke," said David Strickland, the safety administration's administrator.

In 2010, 49 children died from being left inside of cars.

Last year, the number was 33.

Locally, in May, a 13-month-old Lee's Summit boy died in the back of his mother's overheated car when she forgot to drop him off at day care before heading to work as a teacher.

No one knows how many children will die in the same manner this year.

"We have a lot more work to do," Strickland said as he and others sought to raise awareness for a national "Where's Baby? Look Before You Lock" campaign.

The campaign, launched in May, includes commercials, preventive advice and ads running on satellite radio and websites. The effort, for the first time, links the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration with national advocacy groups, such as Safe Kids Worldwide, working with local groups. In Kansas City, those groups include Children's Mercy, Leawood-based Kids and Cars, and the Safe Kids Metro KC program run by the Mother & Child Health Coalition.

Among the speakers was Jodie Edwards, 38, a Ph.D. from Cincinnati, who told how, four years ago this month, she left her napping, 11-month old daughter, Jenna, in the backseat of her car thinking that she had dropped her off at day care.

"I love my children fiercely and would do anything to keep them safe," she said. "Never in a million years did I think I would have to protect my children from me."

Edwards discovered Jenna dead in the backseat of her car at the end of the day.

From others, child safety advocates said, the common reaction is one of horror and expressions of disgust at parents who appear to be so careless.

“People like to demonize parents,” said with Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids and Cars. “They have such vitriol.”

Few cases involve purposefully negligent parents. In many cases, curious children at home climb into unlocked cars or into car trunks and overheat. As with Edwards, many, distracted by other thoughts, convince themselves that they have gone about their normal routines. They think they dropped off the child at day care or at school, discovering only too late what’s happened.

“I have seen some of the best and most loving parents ever who have suffered this terrible fate,” Kate Carr, president and chief executive officer of Safe Kids Worldwide, said at the event. Thus, the campaign’s goal: Prevention, offering tips that come under the acronym ACT: Avoid. Create reminders. Take action.

Avoid: Never leave an infant or child unattended in a vehicle, even if the windows are partly open or the engine is running or air conditioning is on.

Lock car doors and trunks.

Don’t let children play in an unattended car.

Always make a habit of looking in the vehicle’s front and backseat before locking it and walking away.

Create reminders: Write yourself a note about your child and place it where you will see it in the vehicle.

Place a purse, briefcase or cellphone in the backseat with your child to avoid walking away without checking.

Keep an object, such as a stuffed toy, in the car’s passenger’s seat as a reminder.

Ask your child-care center to call you anytime your child does not arrive on time for care.

Take action: If you see a child alone in a hot vehicle, call 911 immediately.

If a child seems in heat distress, get him out and cool the child not with ice, but by spraying him with cool water, even from a garden hose.

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