

Editorial | Backing up safely

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The stories to be found at *kidsandcars.org* are every parent's nightmare. Only the nightmares are true for the families represented there.

Cameron Gulbransen's father, a pediatrician, writes of carefully moving the family SUV in the driveway and hitting a bump. That turned out to be Cameron, 2, who had gotten out of the house without his father knowing. "As a physician I knew it was the end," Cameron's dad wrote. "I did everything I could do and so did the paramedics. Cameron had died a sudden and horrible death because he was too small for me to see him behind my vehicle."

Marlee Anne Kalmin was a little shy of 3 when her family decided to go look at holiday decorations in the city; her father was backing out the car when he felt a bump. "I backed over my baby girl because I could not see her behind my vehicle," Marlee's dad wrote. "My whole world stopped in that instant. If rear view cameras came as a standard feature, my daughter would be alive today. I would have seen her behind my vehicle. Rear view cameras should be a must so that no other family has to experience the pain and loss that our family did."

What Marlee's dad wished for — rear view cameras in cars and trucks, allowing operators to know when someone or something is in the sizable blind spot behind them — were set to become reality for all passenger vehicles by 2014. Unfortunately, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has again delayed the decision to require them.

The need for the cameras is clear, and the government should not keep putting off the requirement. *Consumer Reports* says that rear blind zones ranges from about 25 feet for a minivan to 50 feet for some pick-up trucks. That's a lot of room for tragic mistakes.

As *The New York Times* reported, "Regulators say that 95 to 112 deaths and as many as 8,374 injuries could be avoided each year by eliminating the wide blind spot behind a vehicle. Government statistics indicate that 228 people of all ages — 44 percent of whom are under age 5 — die every year in back-over accidents involving passenger vehicles. About 17,000 people a year are injured in such accidents." (NHTSA reports that more than 30 percent of those killed in back-over accidents are older than 70.)

Requiring rear view cameras would do a lot for public safety, but drivers should never let down their guard when it comes to defensive driving no matter how much new technology helps. There is too much at stake to rely solely on cameras.

As Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety told the *Times*, "In terms of emotional tragedy, back-over deaths are some of the worst imaginable. When you have a parent that kills a child in an incident that's utterly avoidable, they don't ever forget it."

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