



NEWS RELEASE

KidsAndCars.org

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Safety Groups Win Decision to Make Power Windows Less Dangerous for Children, But Government Says “No” to Fail Safe Technology to Eliminate Problem

April 13, 2006 - In response to a petition filed in October, 2004 by safety groups, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation, has decided to ban dangerous power window rocker or toggle switches from U.S. manufactured passenger vehicles. At least 50 children have been killed and thousands of children and adults have been injured by power windows. Rocker and toggle switches allow young children to inadvertently activate power windows that can trap children by the head or arm, resulting in death and serious injury. In a new rule issued April 12, 2006, the agency will instead require safer pull-up or pull-out switch designs that have been standard on European and Japanese vehicles for years.

A coalition of child safety groups including Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (Advocates), KidsAndCars.org, the Zoie Foundation, Trauma Foundation, Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety, Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union, Public Citizen, the Center for Auto Safety and others sought agency action to ban dangerous rocker switches from being installed in passenger vehicles sold in the U.S. NHTSA granted that part of the safety groups' petition that requested elimination of the dangerous rocker switch design for power windows, sun/moon roofs, and other powered moveable partitions. The agency action also complies with a requirement in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), enacted last year.

While this rule change will improve safety by reducing some of the accidental power window injuries that take place each year, unfortunately, occupants will still be able to activate power windows using the pull-up or pull-out switches without knowing that another occupant has their fingers, hand or arm in the window path.

In order to eliminate child deaths and injuries caused by power windows, safety groups also asked NHTSA to consider requiring “auto reverse” technology. This technology will cause power windows to stop and then reverse direction automatically when an object, such as the hand or head of a child is in the path of the window. The same type of technology is already in widespread use to prevent deaths and injuries resulting from accidental closure of garage and elevator doors. It is also standard equipment on many vehicles sold in Europe, including makes and models sold by U.S. automakers. The agency denied that part of the petition.

“We are pleased the agency took this action but it does not completely eliminate the problem. Deaths and injuries of children due to power window activation will continue until the agency requires auto reverse technology for power windows. Safety groups will continue to press the House and Senate to pass legislation, S. 1948 and H.R. 2230, directing NHTSA to move forward on auto reverse technology,” stated Jackie Gillan, Vice-President of Advocates.

Janette Fennell, founder and president of KidsAndCars.org said she “is encouraged about this new regulation; but wants to make sure the public understands that this is only part of the solution. When window sensors are added to all power windows we can literally eradicate power window strangulation as a cause of death. The technology already exists to prevent these tragedies and it should be standard equipment on every vehicle sold or leased in the US.”

About KidsAndCars.org: Founded in 1996, KidsAndCars.org is a national nonprofit child safety organization dedicated to preventing injuries and deaths of children in and around motor vehicles. KidAndCars.org promotes awareness among parents, caregivers and the general public about the dangers to children, including backover and frontover incidents, and heatstroke from being inadvertently left in a vehicle. The organization works to prevent tragedies through data collection, education and public awareness, policy change and survivor advocacy.