



Twittercue: Jody Esposito of #KidsAndCars.org tells about #heatstroke that took her son's life, to support #NHTSA prevention efforts.

NEWS RELEASE

KidsAndCars.org

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Mom tells about son's death in car trunk to help prevent hot car tragedies

Federal government steps up efforts to prevent child deaths in hot vehicles

Las Vegas, NEV. – Sept. 21, 2011.... Most parents think it could never happen to them. But children continue to die in hot vehicles – and parents and families across the country endure the worst nightmare imaginable.

Jody Esposito-Newcomb of KidsAndCars.org spoke out today at a **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** (NHTSA) event in Las Vegas to help prevent other Nevada families from having to endure the life-long grief of losing a child. "It's too late for me and my family, but I hope by telling our story these unthinkable tragedies can be prevented," she said. NHTSA brought together local safety advocates, health professionals, law enforcement officials and concerned residents today to discuss ways to prevent the modern-day phenomena of children being unknowingly left alone in vehicles and how to prevent children from gaining access to hot vehicles.

Esposito-Newcomb shared her excruciating painful story about how her family's life changed forever in May 2001. She spoke about the loss of her precious son, 5-year-old Michael, in an effort to prevent these unthinkable tragedies. "Please take extreme caution any time there are children around vehicles, even when they are parked," she emphasized.

Another speaker, Denver County Court Judge Mary Celeste, told how a simple error she made after learning about the death of her father, brought her to learn about the dangers children face if left alone in vehicles.

Fortunately, Judge Celeste's July 2011 incident had a happy ending after leaving her 6-year-old granddaughter alone in a vehicle while quickly running into a store. Since her granddaughter lives in another state, Judge Celeste was not accustomed to traveling with her while running errands. Her granddaughter's request to stay in the car to listen to her favorite CD they had just checked-out from the library seemed very reasonable at the time. Judge Celeste did not fully understand the dangers of leaving a child alone in a vehicle which made it difficult to know how to say 'no' to that seemingly reasonable request by her granddaughter. The judge is now a spokesperson for KidsAndCars.org to help raise awareness about the dangers of leaving children alone in vehicles.

There have been at least 27 child vehicular heat stroke fatalities in the U.S. this year, but none of those were in Nevada...and we would like to keep it that way," states Janette Fennell, president of KidsAndCars.org. A tragic record 49 children died in 2010 in hot vehicles. Fourteen child vehicular heat stroke deaths have been documented by KidsAndCars.org for the state of Nevada since June of 1996. The last tragedy took place in June 2008 and before that there hadn't been a fatality since July 2005.

Sen. Valerie Weiner and KidsAndCars.org sponsored Nevada's "Unattended Child in Motor Vehicle Act," and passed in 2003, making it illegal to leave a child under 7-years-old alone in a vehicle. This law provides a preventive approach by educating Nevadans about the dangers of leaving a child alone in a vehicle.

"The KidsAndCars.org message is very clear – Never leave a child alone in a vehicle and don't think a tragedy like this can't happen to you or someone you know," said Fennell. "No one is immune."

The organization is pleased that Ron Medford, NHTSA deputy administrator, is spearheading efforts in Nevada to eliminate child deaths in hot vehicles by 2013.

KidsAndCars.org has incorporated a provision as part of the reauthorization of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which could help prevent these inadvertent deaths. Equipping vehicles with sensors to detect the presence of the child and sound a warning when a child is left inside would help prevent these deaths when the driver's memory fails. Similar warning features currently remind drivers when they have left the key in the ignition or left the headlights on.

Based on incidents documented by KidsAndCars.org:

- 54 percent of the time children die after being unknowingly left inside a hot vehicle.
- 32 percent when children got into a vehicle on their own similar to what happened to Michael Esposito.
- 12 percent when they were knowingly left in vehicle.
- 2 percent of the circumstances were not clear.

Safety Tips from KidsAndCars.org

KidsAndCars.org provides the **BE SAFE** safety tips on an information card being distributed to new parents as part of the information packet given to them when having a baby:

Back seat – Put something in the back seat of your vehicle that requires you to open the door every time you park – cell phone, employee badge, handbag, etc.

Every child should be correctly restrained in the back seat.

Stuffed animal – Keep a stuffed animal in your child's car seat. Place it on the front seat as a reminder when your baby is in the back seat.

Ask your babysitter or child-care provider to call you if your child hasn't arrived on time.

Focus on driving – Avoid cell phone calls and texting while driving.

Every time you park make it a routine to open the back door of your car to check that no one has been left behind.

KidsAndCars.org provides these additional safety tips:

- Keep vehicles locked at all times, even in the garage or driveway, and always set your parking brake.
- Keys and remote openers should never be left within reach of children.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.
- If you see a child alone in a vehicle, get involved. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.
- If they are hot or seem sick, get them out as fast as possible. Be especially careful about keeping children safe in and around cars during busy times, schedule changes and periods of crisis or holidays.
- Use drive-through services when available (restaurants, banks, pharmacies, dry cleaners, etc.)
- Use your debit or credit card to pay for gas at the pump.

For additional information about ways to keep children safe in and around vehicles, visit www.KidsAndCars.org

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About KidsAndCars.org: Founded in 1996 in California, KidsAndCars.org is a national nonprofit child safety organization dedicated to preventing injuries and deaths of children in and around motor vehicles. KidsAndCars.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.