

Remarks Prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association
“An Arc of Safety for Every Child and Teen”

Washington, DC

February 5, 2013

Thank you, Jonathon [Jonathon Judge, Partner, Schiff Hardin LLP] for that generous introduction. I am truly honored to be with all of you this morning. The Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association is a longtime ally of all of us the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. You are the leader on regulatory issues and on the oversight of thousands of juvenile products manufactured in this country each year. It's a huge undertaking and responsibility to track so many kinds of products and I salute your tenacity and effectiveness.

I also need you to know how deeply your dedication resonates with my own efforts and the work of my staff at NHTSA. We are all tightly bound together in the sacred mission of ensuring child safety.

As a society, our safety consciousness in general has been dramatically raised over the years. And when it comes to highway safety, I know from personal experience that we've come a long, long way.

Reflective of a great number of Americans at the time, my parents did not have me in the proper restraints when I was a boy. When I rode in my Mom's 1977 Lincoln Continental Mark V, it wasn't just that I didn't wear a seat belt: I wasn't even in the seat! I was lying across the rear panel behind the back seat, blissfully unrestrained. Thankfully, there's no way that children can get away with that behavior in 2013. Our safety messages to parents today emphasize the importance of securing children in a safety seat, a booster seat, or a seat belt.

At Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, I have the best job in the world, working with a talented and committed staff to save lives and reduce injuries on our roadways each and every day. Nowhere is that commitment stronger than in our high-priority efforts to ensure the safety of children.

In fact, we overlay our safety focus, our campaigns and outreach, across every stage of a child's development: from the infant and the toddler, to the pre-teen, to the teenager just learning to drive. We want them all to be safe and secure in the family car, aware of vehicle traffic when they cross the street, and protected by the humble yellow school bus to and from school. And when they're old enough to drive, we want them to be always alert and focused on driving, not texting or talking on a cell phone.

Today I want to explore the idea of vehicle safety across these stages of a child's life. I'll begin with an issue that's had a huge impact on me: The tragedy of young children who die of heatstroke when they're inadvertently left alone in a vehicle, often strapped in their car seat.

HEATSTROKE

Heatstroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle-related deaths for children under the age of 14. Last summer I was barnstorming across the country to raise awareness of heatstroke's horrific toll on very young children.

The problem is simple and agonizing: Parents and caregivers with a lot on their mind forget they have a passenger in the back seat. They arrive at their destination, lock the car, and walk away—leaving the child behind. And when the thermometer hits the low 80s, the temperature inside a vehicle can reach deadly levels in only 10 minutes, even with a window rolled down two inches.

Last year, 31 children across the US lost their lives to heatstroke. And while that number is the lowest in six years, from our perspective even one child fatality is unacceptable.

In 2011, NHTSA convened a first-of-its-kind heatstroke roundtable and conducted a series of town hall discussions in the states hardest hit by heatstroke fatalities.

Last year we delivered on our promise to bring safety advocates, industry experts, and health and law enforcement professionals together for our public education campaign: "Where's Baby? Look Before You Lock." In August 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services joined the effort to publicize our campaign.

We also commissioned research to evaluate after-market products designed to prevent a child from being unintentionally left behind in a vehicle. I wish I could report today that we've discovered a technological silver bullet that will end heatstroke deaths immediately. Instead, the results indicate that currently-available notification devices are not sufficiently effective or reliable as a stand-alone preventive measure.

We also need to recognize that devices and technologies do not address the 20-40 percent of children who are killed when they gain access to a vehicle without an adult knowing about it. Parents and caregivers need to remember the importance of locking cars and keeping the keys out of a child's reach.

The tragedy within the tragedy is that these deaths are 100 percent preventable. The key is behavioral change, to lead the way, with an eye towards supporting innovation in the future.

CAR SEATS

While heatstroke deaths command media attention, I want to focus for a moment on the importance of routinely securing children in car seats for each and every trip. Young passengers are an extremely vulnerable population. We know that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children ages 8 to 15 and the second leading cause of death for children 4 to 7 years old.

We also know that the best way to protect our children is to secure them in a car seat that's appropriate for their age—and to make sure that parents understand how to use those seats properly. To give children a safe ride, parents need to select the right seat and make sure they use it correctly each and every time they travel.

We've learned that properly installing and using child safety seats can be difficult for some parents—there are many kinds of seats to choose from. The agency estimates that nearly three out of four parents do not properly use child restraints. And when car seats are not installed correctly, children are at greater risk.

Last September we published a survey that revealed the most significant and frequently observed mistakes that parents and caregivers make when using car seats:

- A child may slide out of a seat in a crash because the wrong harness slot is used to secure the seat.
- Loose straps may not hold a child snugly.
- A loose car seat installation could put the child at greater risk of being hurt in a crash.

- And misplaced lap belts can result in abdominal injuries or cause the belt to be less effective in a crash.

Our survey also found that 20 percent of parents and caregivers did not read any instructions on how to properly install their child restraints, yet 90 percent felt “confident” or “very confident” that their car seats and booster seats were installed correctly. It is vital that all parents recognize their responsibility to correctly install the car seat that’s best for their child. We continue to invest time and effort to help parents and caregivers install their booster seats correctly.

We emphasize this issue during our annual Child Passenger Safety Week, when we launch a public service announcement—“The Right Seat, The Right Age, The Right Use”—to remind parents that it never hurts to get some help when their child’s safety is at stake. We also refer them to our Web resource, www.safercar.gov/therightseat, so they can learn how to select, install, and use the correct safety seat—and protect their child on each and every trip.

I know from personal experience that all parents can learn to do this right. A few years ago, during National Child Passenger Safety Week event with Safekids, I met Sylvia Perkins-Swain, a child safety seat technician who works in Southeast DC. She waits in a parking lot three days a week to teach parents how to properly install their car seats. Sylvia’s been doing this for eight years and is one of the best. She so inspired me that even I was finally able to earn my child safety seat installation certification last year.

SEAT BELTS AND SAFETY AWARENESS

Children aged 8-12 are poised to make the important transition from riding in a booster seat to wearing a seat belt. This is a milestone for both children and parents that often creates conflict.

While the child may feel that graduating to a seat belt makes her a grown-up, the parent needs to ensure that she remains in a booster seat until she's big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. And while many children want to move quickly to the front seat, parents need to keep them in the back seat as long as possible because it's safer there.

These transitions provide opportunities for parents to establish the foundation for a lifelong habit of seat belt use that will help protect their child in the future. We encourage parents to establish a family tradition of teaching and discussing the importance of responsible driving, including the dangers of speeding, not wearing a seat belt, and driving while impaired or distracted.

I'd like to now give you an update on the MAP-21 rulemakings and other measures we have taken to upgrade child restraints.

- On February 27, 2012, the agency issued final rules to incorporate the Hybrid III 10-year old dummy into the federal motor vehicle safety standards to evaluate the growing number of child safety seats and boosters made for children weighing 65 pounds or greater. The 10-year-old dummy is the latest addition to the family of crash test dummies and is the best tool available to evaluate how well the higher-weight restraint systems manage crash energy.
- On July 6, 2012, President Obama signed the "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act" (MAP-21), P.L. 12-141, in which Subtitle E, "Child Safety Standards," directs the Secretary to consider various rulemaking actions to enhance child safety including improving side impact protection for children in child restraints, improving the ease of use of child restraint anchorage systems, and amending the bench seat in the standard to better simulate a single representative motor vehicle rear seat. These child safety action items in MAP-21 were already in progress according to NHTSA's Vehicle Safety and Fuel Economy Rulemaking and Research Priority Plan 2011-2013.

- The agency is developing proposals to incorporate a side impact test procedure, performance requirements, and a new 3-year-old side impact child dummy, “Q3s” into Standard No. 213 to evaluate side impact protection of child restraint systems. This test would be the first of its kind in the world to evaluate child restraints in a sled system that simulates the vehicle acceleration and the intruding door of a small passenger car in a side impact (a vehicle-to-vehicle intersection crash). These proposals are expected to be issued in 2013.
- Recent surveys of child restraint system installations indicate that only 60 to 70 percent of installations use the available child restraint anchorage system and that misuse and installation errors persist in spite of consumer education efforts. Therefore, the agency is developing a proposal to improve the ease of use and the usability of child restraint anchorage systems to facilitate increased use of child restraint anchorages and correct child seat installation. This proposal would also respond to MAP-21 mandates.
- Regarding upgrades to the standard bench seat in MAP-21, the agency already has an ongoing effort examining how well the test parameters of the FMVSS No. 213 sled test replicate the real world, including crash pulse, test velocity, excursion limits, the test seat, and method of child restraint attachment to the test seat (e.g., type of seat belt).

Thank you so much.