



CHILD SAFETY SEAT CHECKUP EVENT

PLANNING GUIDE

Developed by

PASSENGER SAFETY EDUCATION



In cooperation with

The Texas Department of Transportation

2001



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Preface



The *Child Safety Seat Checkup Event Planning Guide* has been developed by the Passenger Safety Education Team of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation, Traffic Operation Division, Traffic Safety Section.

The Passenger Safety Team would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their assistance in reviewing this guide:

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- Judy Gully, Nolan County Extension Agent- Family and Consumer Sciences
- Beth Horner, Events Coordinator, Central Church of Christ, Bryan, TX
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Child Safety Seat Checkup Event Planning Guide

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Introduction

As part of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service (Extension), the Passenger Safety Education Project offers outreach education in occupant protection to people throughout Texas. The goal of the Passenger Safety Education Project is to reduce motor vehicle crashes, fatalities, injuries, and associated costs. The strategy to reach the goal is to increase restraint use rates for children, youth, and adults through programming and collaboration. Extension serves all 254 Texas counties with educational programs designed to meet the needs of local citizens. County Extension agents work as community educators and facilitators to deliver these educational programs. Collaboration with the Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Department of Health Safe Riders, USAA and others add to the success of educational efforts.

According to Hal Karp in an article written for Reader's Digest, March 1999, "there are more than 100 models of safety seats and more than 300 models of passenger vehicles and a wide range of safety belt systems." Misuse of child safety seats is estimated to be as high as 90%, due in part to the complex issue of compatibility between vehicle seats, safety belts, and child safety seats. Given that fact, it is essential that parents and care givers know how to correctly install a child safety seat in any vehicle. Conducting a child safety seat checkup event is a popular method of teaching the finer points of child safety seat installation and best practices. A well-organized event can combine the resources and talents of community businesses and individuals for a lively, well-attended educational event.

A checkup event will:

- attract public attention to the issue of safety
- work one-on-one with families
- share vital information on transporting children safely
- inform participants of the "best practices"

The *Child Safety Seat Checkup Event Planning Guide* will assist community leaders and child safety seat advocates in planning and hosting an event.

Planning the Event

There are nine comprehensive steps in planning a child safety seat checkup event. Strong partnerships form a solid foundation for planning a child safety seat checkup event.

Step 1: Partnerships



Establishing partnerships with local businesses and organizations will enhance a child safety seat checkup event. Partnerships allow individuals to work together for a common purpose to make more effective and efficient use of their resources.

Many civic organizations and agencies express interest in child passenger safety issues. To maximize interest, begin by inviting key players in the community and organizations to a meeting to explain the purpose and value of a child safety seat checkup event. Suggest the following levels of support:

- volunteers
- financial support
- donation of food and drinks
- donation of printing for flyers
- donation of tables and chairs
- donation of trash cans
- donation of free “goodies” to give to attending families

Set a second meeting time and date with the objective to set the date of the event.



Many child safety seat checkup events are hosted at car dealerships, and dealerships may choose to purchase the child safety seats needed to conduct the checkup event. See *Example A* for a sample letter to solicit dealership participation. Event partners may include, but are not limited to:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| — Law Enforcement | — Day Care Centers |
| — Fire Departments | — Medical Community |
| — Local Businesses | — Local Clergy |
| — Local Public Officials | — Local Celebrity |
| — Media | — Health and Education Partner Organizations |

Step 2: Date, Time & Location



Before adequate planning can take place, set a date, time and location for the checkup event. Consider the following:

Date: Determine a date. Ideally, plan three months in advance. Saturday is popular with coordinators, participants, and parents; however, a weekday is successful if special consideration is given to time and location.

Step 2: Date, Time & Location (cont'd)

Time: Set time for working parents as well as stay-at-home parents if the event is planned for a weekday. For a Saturday, plan 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM, or 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM. During the week, choose a time later in the afternoon, such as 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM. Events are usually conducted in four hour blocks.

Location: When choosing a location, there are several options to consider:

- Choose a discount store or a shopping center parking lot on a main street, especially if one or more of the stores carry baby and child care products.
- Contact local store manager and determine if a special permit or paperwork needs to be completed.

Key factors when selecting a location include:

- restroom facilities for volunteers
- large parking lot
- shaded area for all volunteers
- easy entrance and exit for vehicles



In severe heat it is critical to prevent heatstroke.

Step 3: Secure Volunteers



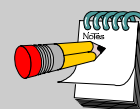
In order to conduct a successful child safety seat checkup event, it is imperative that National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) trained, certified technicians are the only individuals who offer technical advice about child safety seats. Planning a child safety seat checkup event requires several volunteers and advocates. It is important to understand the role each volunteer plays on the day of the event. It is suggested that the following people work at the event:

Technician:

Technician(s) must have completed the NHTSA technical training on child safety seats and have experience with other child safety seat events.

A technician is responsible for:

- checking safety seats
- teaching parents correct use and installation
- determining which questions need to be referred to the senior checker



Tip

It may be necessary to secure a technician who knows sign language to assist deaf participants. Also, if appropriate, secure a bilingual technician to work with families when English is not the first language.



For liability purposes, it is important that the parent is the last to “touch” or install the safety seat. Technicians must make sure parents are fully informed and comfortable with how to install and use the seat properly upon leaving the event.

Step 3: Secure Volunteers (cont'd)

Senior Checker (Certified Technician Instructor):

A senior checker must have extensive child passenger safety training and experience. A NHTSA certified technician instructor is best qualified to serve as a senior checker.

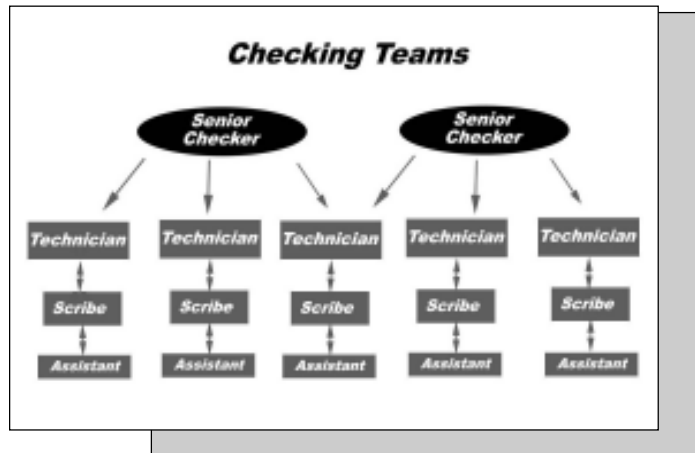
The senior checker is responsible for:

- obtaining a current safety seat recall list for use by technicians
- briefing all volunteers regarding responsibilities for the event
- explaining the checkup form to all technicians and scribes
- supporting the work of other technicians
- instructing parents on how to install safety seats as needed
- explaining “gray areas” and “best practices” as needed
- following up with parents on issues and questions which are difficult to resolve

See *Resource A* for information on securing technicians and senior checker.

Checking Team:

The ideal checking team includes a **technician**, a **scribe**, and an **assistant**. It is important to have one checking team for each traffic lane where safety seats will be checked. It is recommended that one additional team is available to rotate with other teams to allow for breaks. See *Example B* for checking team worksheet.



Scribe:

Each checking team must have a scribe to record information on a standardized checkup form.

The scribe is responsible for:

- securing parent’s signature on checkup form
- checking the recall list
- noting current practices of parents, with assistance of technicians
- recording replacement seat information, if any
- filling out the registration card for a new child safety seat
- recording recommendations
- recording further noteworthy information
- putting extra weight on a child safety seat to assist the technician with installation
- not placing clipboards on vehicles, which can cause scratches to vehicle paint



It is mandatory that all technicians consult with the senior checker for a final check of each seat installed in a vehicle.



For liability purposes, it is important that the scribe is thorough in completing the checkup form. The technician must always review and initial the checkup form prior to the parent leaving. A great resource for scribes is law enforcement personnel.

Step 3: Secure Volunteers (cont'd)

Assistant:

An assistant is useful to the technician and scribe, but not a necessity. The assistant is responsible for:

- looking up car seat instructions
- putting extra weight on a safety seat to assist the technician with installation, if necessary
- retrieving such items as noodles, towels, replacement seats, or locking clips
- any type of help requested by the technician or scribe

Additional Volunteers:

Volunteers may assist in the following ways:

- greet parents with checkup forms
- distribute educational materials
- direct families to appropriate areas for inspection
- manage the flow of traffic
- assist with management of safety seats – both new seats and seats to be destroyed
- communicate in Spanish with Spanish-speaking families
- sign for the hearing impaired

After coordinating with partners and locating key players for the event, provide all technicians and volunteers with the date, time and location. A letter or fax works well. See *Example C* for a sample fax to technicians.

Liability Review



Make sure:

- Parent is last to “touch” or install child safety seat
- Technician and scribe document all actions taken on the checkup form
- Host agency reviews their liability policy regarding event location
- Technician understands extent of his/her liability
- To follow the liability policy from the sponsoring agency
- To have a certified instructor conduct a final check on every child safety seat

Discipline at Checkup Events



In rare instances, children may become unruly and difficult to work with. Generally, parents will intervene and suggest appropriate behavior for the child. In cases where that may not occur, the technician or technician instructor may have to step in and redirect the behavior of the child.

Things to consider when addressing this situation:

- is the child seeking attention from an inattentive parent
- is the weather a factor
- what else is going on to distract or upset the child
- what is the child’s developmental age

After assessing the situation, take appropriate action and document on the checkup form.

“When we keep in mind that discipline is really guiding the child to where we want them to go, we are more than half way to success.”

- Linda Ladd, Ph.D., Family Development Specialist, Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Step 4: Safety Seats



Tip

It is important to have several types of child safety seats available for families. Generally, more convertible seats will be needed than any other type of seat.

It is essential to have new child safety seats available at the checkup in the event a child safety seat needs to be replaced. The goal is to ensure that all children leave the checkup in the safest situation possible. To achieve this goal, a child safety seat may be replaced due to one of the following reasons:

- on recall list
- involved in a crash
- older than 5 years (in Texas, five years is considered to be the life of a safety seat)
- does not meet weight or height requirements for a child
- unknown history and identifying stickers are missing

Types of Child Safety Seats



Infant Seat



Convertible Seat



Big Baby Seat Rear-Facing to 30 lbs.



High Back Seat



Belt Positioning Booster Seat

Funding:

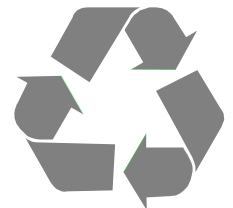
Purchasing a sufficient number of child safety seats may present a challenge. Funding sources or collaboration opportunities may include:

- ⌘ local hospitals with a distribution program
- ⌘ local retailers
- ⌘ automobile dealerships
- ⌘ local SAFE KIDS coalition

Partners may be the best promoters in soliciting financial support. Although unsafe seats will be replaced free of charge, do not publicize that seats will be given away at the event.

Disposal:

Once a child safety seat is replaced due to age, crash involvement, or recall, disposal is essential. There are several ways to accomplish this feat. **Option one:** host a big media event, and crush the safety seats in a car crusher while explaining why the seats are being destroyed. **Option two:** collaborate with a local plastic recycling center. Remove the covers of discarded seats, and cut the harness straps with scissors. Throw away all harness straps at one location and the fabric covers at a second location. The recycling center will accept plastic shells and recycle them. Either option ensures discarded child safety seats are not reused by anyone else.



The child **must** be present to receive a replacement

child safety seat. The child is key to ensuring proper installation, parent education and correct seat use.

Step 5: Media Coverage



News about the significance of child safety seats and safety belts increasingly makes the headlines as the national focus on air bags and children continues. When pitching the event to the local media, emphasize the unique approach that is being taken to combat the nation's leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 4 and under. Those who hear about the event via the media will learn that:

- every child's safety seat must be right for his or her age, size, and weight
- children are safest when they ride buckled up in the back seat in an appropriate safety seat

Several avenues are available to publicize the event including television, radio, newspaper, local businesses, and organizations. The following examples will aid in providing media coverage for the checkup event.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs):

- Contact radio stations in your area and request support using a 30 second public service announcement.
- Sample PSA

Child safety seats work if you use them correctly. Take time to follow the manufacturer's directions. The time you invest in your child's safety could save a life.

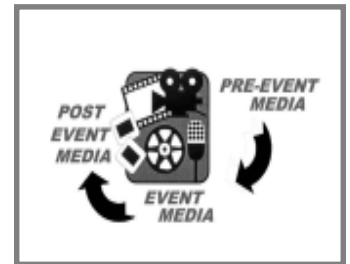
This is Chief/Deputy _____ name _____ inviting all name of town/county residents to attend a free child safety seat check up event on date at location. Certified child passenger safety technicians will be available to check child safety seats for correct installation. Invest in your child's safety; buckle everybody on every trip!

This has been a safety message from the organization name, your local law enforcement insert name, and this radio station.

- Contact public service directors of local television stations and request support with station identification PSA (a quick announcement that runs when the station does its required station ID twice an hour).
- Check into being a guest on a local television program or local radio talk show to promote the event.

Traffic Reports & Law Enforcement:

- In urban areas, contact traffic reporters in the area and request announcements to support the event during traffic reports the day before and day of the checkup event. Follow up by phone as appropriate.
- If the local police department owns a portable variable message board, request use of the board for the day of the event, and station it near the event location. Suggested message: "Car Seat Checkup Event 1-4 PM today at Heartland Mall."



Step 5: Media Coverage (cont'd)



Reproduce the flyer on brightly colored paper

Print Media:

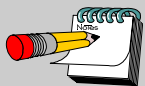
- Send information about the event to the calendar editor of all newspapers in the area. Follow up as appropriate.
- Send or deliver a media advisory to the assignment editors of all newspapers, radio stations, and television stations in the area. Include all the critical information (who, what, when, where, why) and a contact name and phone number. Request a photographer or a reporter be sent to the event.
- Send a news article to the local paper to run for a week prior to the event. See *Example D* for a sample news article to promote the event.

Flyers:

- Design a simple, attractive flyer announcing the event and containing all the critical information. Ask merchants in the area to post the flyer in their store windows or on customer bulletin boards. See *Example E* for a sample flyer. See *Example F* for a flyer distribution list.
- Ask managers of local retail stores and grocery stores, such as Wal-Mart, if flyers may be placed in all shopping carts the week prior to the event.
- Resize the flyer and put it in the local newspaper as a public service announcement.

These are only a few suggestions. There are probably many more avenues to promote the event.

Step 6: Setting Up The Location



Tip

It is important to have plenty of bottled water on hand for participants who may need a cool drink. Fluid is essential — especially during hot weather.

The ideal set up for the checkup event is to establish several lanes for vehicles to pull into for the safety seat checkup, with each lane the width of two vehicles to insure adequate space to maneuver. Each lane should be assigned a checking team of at least two members, preferably three. The senior checker will oversee all inspection lanes. See *Examples G-G(1)* for sample traffic flow maps. Cones are ideal to mark the course of the lanes and will assist cars in pulling forward, rather than backing up, when exiting the lane. Signs are important to direct traffic flow.

A registration table is needed for volunteers to sign-in, indicating name, agency, and contact information. Registration information is important for writing thank you letters. A second table is helpful for placement of safety seat instruction booklets, noodles, towels, locking clips, and other materials the technicians may need while working with the parents.

Refreshments for all volunteers is a nice touch. The type and amount of refreshments made available at the event depend on the time of day the event is held. If the event

Step 6: Setting Up The Location (cont'd)

is held over the noon hour, then food for the volunteers is essential. If the event is held in early afternoon to early evening, snacks will suffice. Check with local food vendors for donations.

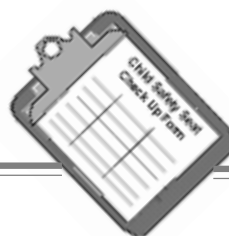
Set up for the event may begin about 1½ hours prior to the advertised start time. Plan ahead to set up the course, unpack new child safety seats, register all volunteers, and have the senior checker brief all checking teams and volunteers.



Tip

Remember to keep the safety of all participants in mind as the site is prepared. Consider a “safe zone” for volunteers to relax and enjoy refreshments.

Step 7: Safety Seat Checkup Form



Upon arrival at the event, a parent must fill out **one** checkup form for **each** child. If there are three children in the vehicle, three forms will be filled out. If a child is not in a safety seat but looks under the age of eight, have the parent fill out a form. Make sure the waiver is complete with signature and date. If a potential participant refuses to sign the waiver, he/she will not be eligible to participate in the checkup event. The remainder of the form will be filled in by the technician and the scribe. A checkup form can be obtained from the Passenger Safety Education Office or the National SAFE KIDS organization. It is critical that the scribe fills in all boxes/bubbles on the checkup form completely. Double-check that:

- date and location of the event are filled in
- name of the technician is listed
- all information is documented on the checkup form
- if a replacement seat is given to a family, the make and model of the new seat is recorded
- if a parent elects to transport his/her child in a way contrary to the technicians’s advice, document on the checkup form and have the parent initial the statement
- the scribe has filled in all information regarding the current seat being used and how it is being used



For liability purposes, it is important that the technician review the documentation on the checkup form and initial prior to the parent leaving the event site.

Step 8: Educational Handouts



Education plays a critical role at each child safety checkup. Education takes place during installation of the child safety seat. Educational handouts also support the hands-on training parents/care-givers are receiving. Provide one packet of information to each vehicle. Items for inclusion in the packet are:

- i NHTSA tip sheet on correct installation
- i safety seat brochures
- i coupons for discounts on safety seats
- i copy of the occupant protection laws in Texas
- i air bag safety materials
- i contact name and phone number for additional information

Also, have all the NHTSA tip sheets (nine total) readily available for a team member or technician to use for particular needs. Tip sheets can be obtained from the NHTSA web site: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov> or by calling the Passenger Safety Education office at (409) 845-3850.



Tip

It is a good idea to have educational packets made for both Spanish and English-speaking families.

Step 9: Reporting



An important part of the event is the record of its success. Upon completion of the child safety seat event, it is critical that all paperwork is filed, registration cards are mailed, media receives a follow-up article, and thank you letters are promptly written.

Traditionally, registration cards and checkup forms are collected from the checking teams. Mail registration cards immediately. If the event is sponsored by a SAFE KIDS coalition, check forms must be mailed to the National SAFE KIDS office. The senior checker and technicians must review the forms for completeness prior to mailing the forms. If the event is not sponsored by a SAFE KIDS coalition, keep the forms on file for liability purposes. The checkup forms provide information such as correct use, misuse, number of recall seats, and the number of replacement seats given out to children. These statistics are used for media follow up.

Prepare a write-up to send to the media coordinators previously contacted. Include a photo of the event. A color photo of a technician installing a child safety seat usually works. Use the article to broaden the impact of the message that children are safest when they ride correctly restrained in the rear seat of a vehicle. If newspaper reporters or photographers are present at the event, they may take care of writing the article. Include statistics on the number of child safety seats checked, number of child safety seats given to families, number on recall, and how many child safety seats were correct and incorrect.

Everyone appreciates knowing he/she makes a difference in the lives of others. Send thank you letters to all sponsors, technicians, and volunteers who contributed to the event in any way. Include important information in the letter about the role they played and any statistics from the event. See *Example H* for a sample thank you letter.

Planning Notes

HOW TO SECURE SENIOR CHECKERS AND TECHNICIANS

To obtain a listing of child passenger safety specialists who can serve as Senior Checkers and Technicians, please call:

Nationwide	Texas
Emergency Nurses Assoc.: 202-364-2461	Texas Agricultural Extension Service: 409-845-3850
International Assoc. of Chiefs of Police: 800-490-0454	Texas Department of Transportation: see Resource A(1)
National SAFE KIDS Campaign: 202-662-0600	Texas Department of Public Safety: see Resource A(2)
	Texas Safe Riders : 800-252-8255
	Texas SAFE KIDS Coalitions: see below

Texas SAFE KIDS Coalitions

CITY	PHONE	FAX
Austin	512-324-1985	512-324-1972
Corpus Christi-Nueces Co.	512-851-7222/7200	512-850-1312
Dallas Area	214-456-8620	214-456-7676
Greater Houston	713-770-2045	713-770-2440
Metro San Antonio	210-358-4272	210-358-1887
Potter/Randall (Amarillo)	806-468-4345	806-468-4391
Rio Grande Valley	956-668-7900	956-630-5309
San Angelo	915-947-6130	915-947-6769
Tarrant County (Ft. Worth)	817-885-4244	817-335-5160
Texas Statewide	800-252-8255	512-458-7666
Waco-McLennan Co.	254-714-1160	254-753-4415

Texas Department of Transportation Traffic Safety Specialists

District 1 - Paris
(903) 737-9200

District 10 - Tyler
(903) 510-9266

District 14 - Austin
(512) 832-7253

District 18 - Dallas
(214) 320-6233

District 2 - Ft. Worth
(817) 370-6618

District 11 - Lufkin
(409) 633-4395

District 15 - San Antonio
(210) 731-5214

District 19 - Atlanta
(903) 799-1487

District 3 - Wichita Falls
(940) 720-7729

District 20 - Beaumont
(409) 898-5719

District 4 - Amarillo
(806) 356-3295

District 21 - Pharr
(956) 702-6154

District 5 - Lubbock
(806) 748-4478

District 22 - Laredo
(956) 712-7775

District 6 - Odessa
(915) 498-4748

District 23 - Brownwood
(915) 643-0463

District 7 - San Angelo
(915) 947-9271

District 8 - Abilene
(915) 676-6802

District 12 - Houston
(713) 802-5185

District 16 - Corpus Christi
(361) 808-2205

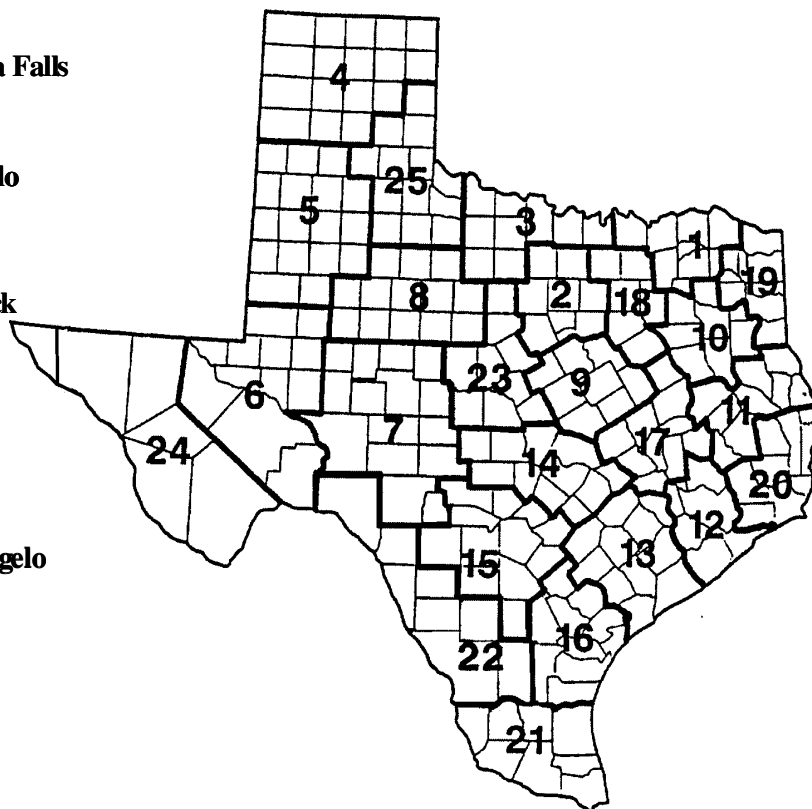
District 24 - El Paso
(915) 774-4384

District 9 - Waco
(254) 867-2725

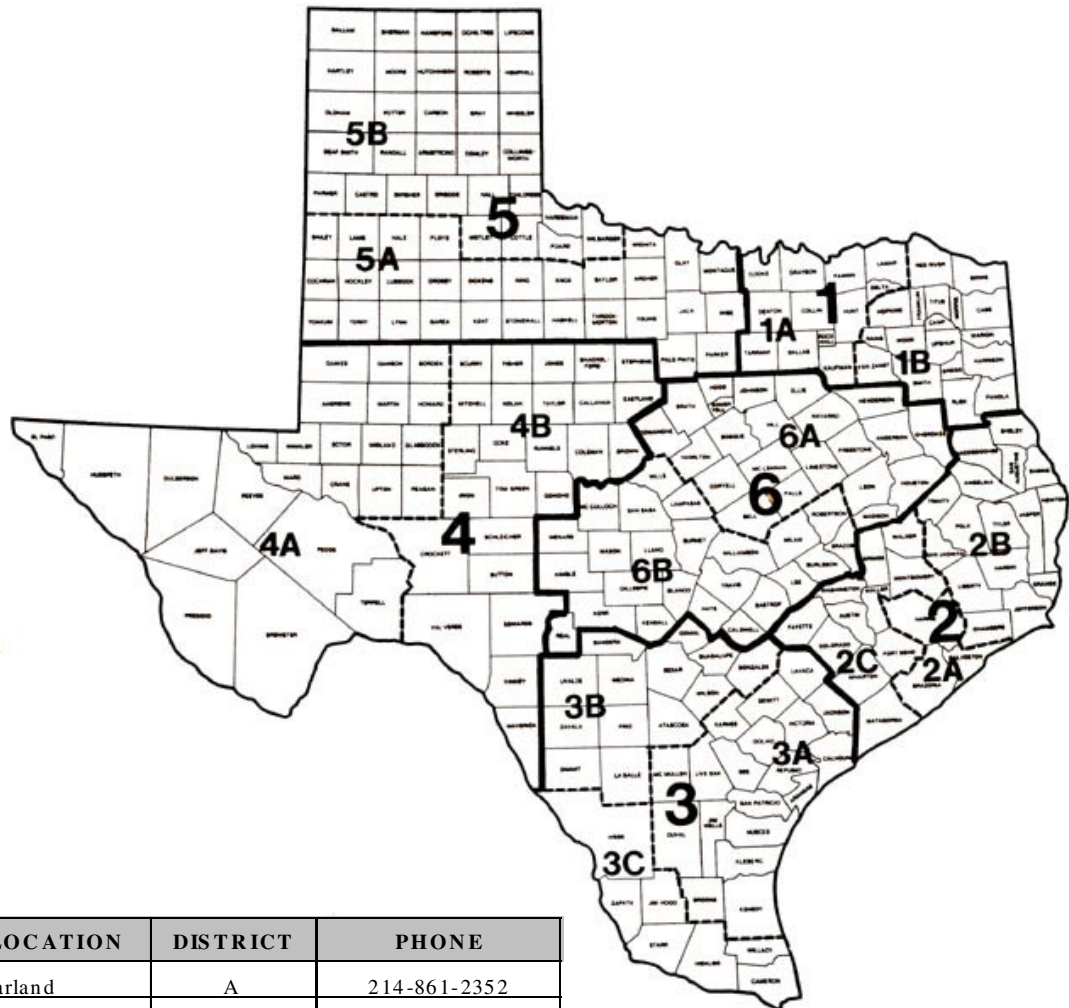
District 13 - Yoakum
(512) 293-4338

District 17 - Bryan
(409) 778-9755

District 25 - Childress
(940) 937-7145



Texas Department of Public Safety Traffic Law Enforcement Division Regional Boundaries and District Lines



REGION	LOCATION	DISTRICT	PHONE
1	Garland	A	214-861-2352
	Tyler	B	903-566-9740
2	Houston	A	713-957-6122
	Beaumont	B	409-898-0770
	Conroe	C	409-539-2221
3	Corpus Christi	A	512-854-2681
	San Antonio	B	210-531-2262
	McAllen	C	956-682-5556
4	Midland	A	915-697-2211
	Abilene	B	915-692-6331
5	Lubbock	A	806-747-4491
	Amarillo	B	806-359-4751
6	Waco	A	254-867-4647
	Austin	B	512-873-3100

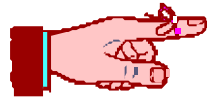
CHECK LIST FOR PLANNING

- ' Secure commitment from event partners, including:
 - ✓ Automobile dealership
 - ✓ Health and education partner organizations
 - ✓ Police department
 - ✓ Fire department
 - ✓ Local businesses
 - ✓ Local public officials
 - ✓ Local celebrities
- ' Determine date, time and location for your event
- ' Recruit volunteers from event partners to staff the event. Volunteers should be assigned as:
 - ✓ Technicians, scribes and assistants
 - ✓ Greeters to stand by main entrance and direct all families to appropriate location
 - ✓ Escorts for any mascots that may be available (e.g. Buckle Bear, Vince & Larry)
 - ✓ Assistants to media who attend the event
 - ✓ Staffers for distribution of educational materials to parents
 - ✓ Host/Hostess to oversee refreshment area
 - ✓ Photographer to take Polaroid pictures of mascots with children and photos of technicians at work in vehicles
- ' Solicit donations in advance of items to be given away, including refreshments
- ' Plan your publicity strategy
- ' Prepare a layout for event to include the following activities:
 - ✓ Check station areas
 - ✓ Traffic flow pattern (keep in mind to keep everyone safe)
 - ✓ Refreshment area
 - ✓ Media station
 - ✓ Live remote area
 - ✓ Automobiles displayed with child safety seats installed
 - ✓ Registration table for volunteers to sign-in
- ' Disseminate a prepared list of responsibilities for all event volunteers
- ' Schedule all volunteers to arrive at the event site at least one hour before the event or their shift to set up and one hour after the event to clean up
- ' Develop a back-up plan in case of inclement weather
- ' Obtain child safety seat checkup material:
 - ✓ See tools needed for check up event
 - ✓ Safety seats to use for replacements
 - ✓ Checkup forms
 - ✓ Traffic cones
- ' Write thank you notes to all sponsors, technicians and other volunteers that assisted with the event

CHILD SAFETY SEAT CHECKUP TOOLS

Tools Needed:

- Manufacturer's instructions
- Clipboards, pens/pencils
- Recall list(s)
- Checkup forms
- Traffic cones
- Checkup event banner or sign
- Caution tape/rope to designate "safe" area
- Child safety seats for loan or giveaway (infant, convertible, and booster)
- Towels and/or pool noodles
- Rubber shelf liner material
- Locking clips (regular and heavy duty, belt shortening clips)
- Chalk, fabric marking pen, masking tape or sticky dots
- Bungee cords or commercial "belt threaders," hemostat(s)
- Rubber gloves
- Scissors
- Hand sanitizer
- Duct tape
- Bathroom scales
- Name tags for volunteers
- Camera & film
- NHTSA child transportation safety tip sheets
- Free "goodies" to give to participating families
- Tables



Tips to Remember

- U Stay aware of the occupants of the vehicle, especially small children. Do not allow them to wander away from the vehicle and driver/parent.
- U Guide vehicles into, through and out of checking lanes.
- U It's always better to have drivers wait in line than to attempt to help them in an unsafe area.
- U In checkup event publicity, ask the drivers to bring towels, directions for their child safety seat and their vehicle owner's manual and read them before they arrive.
- U If a child safety seat is on a recall list and cannot be repaired, or if the seat has visible damage, or has been in a crash, ask the driver/parent to donate the "unsafe" seat. If the parent donates the seat, document on form and have parent initial. Make sure to either destroy the seat or mark it carefully for display/teaching purposes.
- U If the location established for the event is in the parking lot of a store where child safety seats are sold, drivers will have easy access to replace an unsafe seat that does not fit or is unsafe.
- U Attempt to find a resource for free child safety seats to be offered to drivers who do not have the resources to purchase their own. These seats could also be a temporary loaner for parents who can access a seat later, rather than allowing any child to leave the checkup event without a safe, properly secured restraint.
- U Always make sure the driver/parent knows how to install the child safety seat correctly. The goal is to demonstrate and teach - not to install the seat. Help the driver/parent learn the skills to install the child safety seat correctly each time they get in their vehicle.
- U Have enough locking clips on hand to give to drivers/parents who need them. Also have some belt shortening clips on hand, as they can be used in any situation. Look on the side, back, bottom and inside of the child safety seat first to determine if they have the clip and didn't realize it.
- U Provide the driver/parent with a copy of the NHTSA Child Transportation Safety Tip Sheet that lists the most appropriate information for the child and their vehicle.
- U In order to assist in making it easier to thread the vehicle safety belt through the back of a forward-facing child safety seat, use a commercial belt threader. The hook on the end of a bungee cord works as well and may be easier to locate.
- U A hemostat can be used to pull the harness straps through the back of the child safety seat when the straps need adjusting.
- U Large, heavy-duty binder clips can also be used to hold belt webbing out at the end of the retractor after pulling it out fully to switch to locking mode.
- U Have plenty of towels or pool noodles to use to help properly position a rear-facing child safety seat at the correct angle. Remember, old towels work best when adjusting seat fit in the vehicle, large new towels are more difficult to compress. Chalk or tape can be used to mark the belt for placement of the locking clip.
- U For slippery vehicle seat surfaces, a strip of the commercial products used to keep area rugs from slipping works well, or use tub/shower mats or rubber shelving paper to secure the seat.
- U If a vehicle or child safety seat is dirty or wet, have rubber gloves available for the technician. If the safety belts are buried in the vehicle seat, have the owner get them out.

Safety should be the number one priority for checker and participant.

Standardized National Certification Process for Child Passenger Safety Technicians and Instructors

Due to the heightened awareness for the safe transportation of children, the field of child passenger safety has become increasingly complex. The need for people with a high level of knowledge and a standardized set of procedures has become more and more evident. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in conjunction with the National Safety Belt Coalition's Pattern for Life Program has created a standardized course for technical specialists to meet that need. The course focuses on the current knowledge and mechanisms of the use and misuse of child safety seats and safety belts by children. Successful completion of the course is the first step toward certification, and it is an excellent training cornerstone for anyone involved in child passenger safety. This includes law enforcement officers, pediatric nurses, county Extension agents, citizen activists, fire and rescue personnel, coordinators of child safety seat checks, etc.

The program is intended for advocates currently working in child passenger safety, or for those individuals who anticipate future involvement within the realm of child passenger safety. Participants' background or interests may be in participating in or supervising child safety seat checkups and conducting or supervising specialized child passenger safety programs.

The training program is designed to be conducted as a four-day program ending with a child safety seat checkup event. Upon completion of the course, participants are required to take a written test and a hands-on test to show knowledge learned. Then all paperwork must be filed with the American Automobile Association (AAA) for final certification.

Anyone interested in attending a four-day Standardized Class should contact their State Highway Safety Office, NHTSA Regional Office, or Passenger Safety Education, Texas Agricultural Extension Service for the latest listing of upcoming classes.

WHAT WOULD A TECHNICIAN DO?

Situations may develop during checkup events that are out of the ordinary. The following scenarios and solutions serve as a point of discussion to assist technicians at events.

Q. How should a technician address uncertified individuals giving out misinformation about a child safety seat?

A. Only National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) trained, certified technicians should offer technical advice about child safety seats. The senior checker should stress this during pre-event briefing. Away from other participants, the technician should remind the individual of the pre-event briefing and the liability involved in giving out information.

Q. What if a parent wants to keep and/or use an unsafe seat?

A. If a parent wants to continue to use an unsafe seat, the technician should refuse to reinstall the seat and have the parent install the seat. The technician must document on the checkup form that the parent insisted on using the unsafe seat and have the parent initial the statement on the checkup form. If a parent wants to keep the unsafe seat to use in a second vehicle, document it on the checkup form and have the parent initial.

Q. What if a family comes to the event with more people than the vehicle has safety belts for?

A. It is important that all children and adults leave the event correctly restrained. One option is to have a police officer transport the extra individuals to their destination. Another option is to have the extra individuals remain at the event until someone else can come pick them up.

Q. What if a parent brings children to the event in a vehicle that is not equipped with safety belts?

A. Again, it is important that all children and adults leave the event correctly restrained. One option is to have the parent call someone to bring another vehicle that is equipped with safety belts. If that is not an option, the technician should consult with the instructor for assistance. Make sure that all action taken is documented on the checkup form.

SPECIAL REPORT

Millions of these devices are misused

Kids at Risk:

The Alarming Truth About Safety Seats

By Hal Karp

Last February Catherine McCormick buckled her nine-month-old son, Timothy, into his safety seat in the back of her Honda Civic. The two then headed out along a route in Centreville, Va., they had driven many times. At an intersection only miles from their house, however, another vehicle turned directly into their path. Before the 29-year-old mother could react, the vehicles collided.

Airlifted from the crash scene to a nearby hospital, Timothy McCormick died the next day from massive head injuries. Fairfax County police officer Bob Wall, a certified child passenger safety instructor, was called in to assist with the accident investigation.

Checking the car, Wall discovered that the safety seat was incorrectly installed. The child's father had turned the seat around to face forward, after a doctor incorrectly said it was okay to do so. A locking clip, a piece of equipment used to keep the car's safety belts tightly secured, was improperly placed. The seat's harness straps, designed to hold the child securely, were not in the top slots—in most cases, the only correct position for a forward-facing seat.

"Any of these factors alone could have resulted in the injury or death of this child," says Wall. "The day I had to interview the father was the hardest of my life."

Too Many Variables. The McCormick case is not an isolated incident. "Millions of parents are unknowingly buckling their kids into improperly installed or recalled seats, often putting their lives at risk," notes Stephanie Tombrello of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., a public-service group.

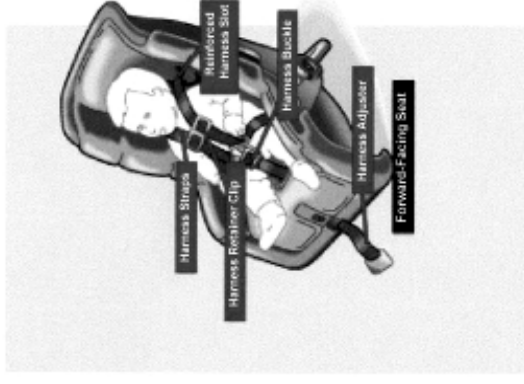
Almost 200 of the 604 children under age five killed as occupants in motor vehicles in 1997 were in safety seats, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration (NHTSA). Based on a multitude of recent surveys, child-safety experts believe it's likely that the majority of those seats were improperly installed. NHTSA

Take This 60-Second Safety Check

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign recommends that whenever possible, children ages 12 and under ride in the back seat of a vehicle. And the safest position for a safety seat, if it can be properly secured, is the center of the back seat.

- A child should ride in a rear-facing seat until at least one year and 20 pounds, and a rear-facing safety seat should never be placed in a vehicle seat equipped with an air bag.
- At one year and 20 pounds, a child can ride in a forward-facing seat equipped with internal harnesses.
- When a child reaches the height and weight limit of his forward-facing seat (as prescribed by the manufacturer), he should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat, to be used in combination with an adult lap and shoulder belt.
- A child is ready for an adult safety belt with no booster when he can sit against the back of the seat and bend his knees over the edge, the lap belt makes good contact low over his hips, and the shoulder belt makes good contact across his chest and collarbone.



also estimates that in 1997, as many as 30,500 infants and children were injured while riding in safety seats.

While it should be easy to install a car safety seat correctly, often it's not. There are more than 100 models of safety seats, more than 300 models of passenger vehicles and a wide range of safety-belt systems. "Rarely will one seat fit every vehicle, and some seats won't fit into some vehicles at all," explains Wall.

Federal regulations expected to be announced soon will mandate that new cars and safety seats have a “universal” attachment system, which will make installation easier. But child-safety advocates warn that this is not an end to the problem: “For the next 15 to 20 years there will be millions of cars and safety seats on the road without the new system,” explains Tombrello. “And even with the universal system, you can’t take human error or lack of awareness out of the equation. This problem’s not going away.”

How widespread is the problem? This past fall Reader’s Digest attended safety-seat checkups conducted by three different grass-roots organizations in California, Minnesota, Texas, Tennessee and Maryland. The results were alarming. Certified child passenger safety technicians checked 345 seats and found that 97 percent of them were installed incorrectly. The average seat showed three to four errors. Nearly one in ten were unknowingly under a NHTSA safety recall. In an accident, the children in these seats were potentially at risk.

The situation is the same on a national level. According to a Reader’s Digest analysis of data on almost 23,000 safety seats inspected by such organizations as the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, the Utah Highway Safety office, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. and Buckle Up Baby, an average of 94 percent—more than 20,000 seats—were found to be dangerously misused.

Worth the Wait. At a SAFE KIDS checkup in Golden Valley, Minn., Julie Opheim pulled into an auto mall while her six-week-old daughter, Hannah, slept in an infant car seat. “I’d been wondering since Hannah was born who could help me with this,” she told Reader’s Digest that evening. “I asked around, but no one knew where to go.”

Her seeming inability to attach the seat tightly enough worried her. “I just had a feeling I wasn’t doing it right.” She isn’t alone. In a recent survey commissioned by Nissan, 72 percent of parents polled felt unsure about their safety-seat installation.

Mike Murphy, a certified child passenger safety technician, climbed into Opheim’s 1997 Ford Taurus. “If you grab the seat at the base where it attaches to the seat belt,” he called out, “you shouldn’t be able to move it more than an inch either way or forward.” Hannah’s seat moved considerably more than that.

Murphy pointed out several other errors. Although Hannah’s seat was placed in the middle of the back seat, generally considered the safest spot, Opheim had mistakenly attached the seat with a safety belt from one of the side passenger seats. The harness straps were too loose; only one adult finger should be able to slide between the harness straps and the child’s collarbone. And the angle of the seat was too steep; rear-facing seats need to be positioned at a 45-degree angle. Any higher and a child’s head could fall forward, closing off his airway. After checking

the seat for recalls, Murphy reinstalled it.

Opheim’s eyes grew somber as Murphy explained that with the seat installed the way it was—using the wrong seat belt and having the loose harness straps—Hannah could have been ejected from her seat and seriously injured, even in a crash occurring at 20 m.p.h. “I had no idea there were so many factors involved in doing this right,” Opheim said.

Her surprised response is not uncommon. According to Bob Wall, whose department conducts two or more checkups a month in Fairfax County, most parents come in with one concern—generally that their seat is too loose—only to be shocked to find that they’ve actually made three or four errors.

Getting the Word Out. Sonya Shahan had read the directions that came with her daughter’s safety seat repeatedly. But at a checkup sponsored last November by the Injury Prevention Center of Greater Dallas, the 29-year-old mother told Reader’s Digest she was baffled as to why her seat was still loose.

Shahan didn’t realize that her car manual had the answer: her Mazda Protegé’s seat-belt system needed to be changed to automatic locking mode before the safety seat could be secured tightly. “This is a very common mistake,” said Dawn Cano, the instructor who inspected Shahan’s seat.

“Most people are unaware that their car manual even covers this topic,” adds Wall.

Another source of confusion, surprisingly, can be poorly informed doctors.

When should the car seat be turned face forward? Guidelines published by the American Academy of Pediatrics state that “Children should face the rear of the vehicle until they are at least 20 pounds and one year of age.” But at a SAFE KIDS checkup in Chattanooga, Tenn., Matthew and Christy Wood told Reader’s Digest that a doctor had advised them to turn their son, Jack, around when he reached 20 pounds—even though he was only eight months old.

“The proper time to turn a child is based on skeletal development, of which age seems to be the best measure,” explains Kathleen Weber, director of the Child Passenger Protection Research Program at the University of Michigan Medical School. “The bones of a child under one are not strong enough to protect the spinal cord if the child is facing forward in a crash. The cord could stretch and tear, resulting in paralysis or death.”

This should be common knowledge to any pediatric health care provider, but that’s not the case, says Dr. Michael Sachs, a Los Angeles-based pediatrician. “During my own residency, we were taught to ask families if they use a safety seat, but we were not

given the training necessary to ensure they were using it correctly.”

Lost in the Shuffle. At a local resale shop, Meredith Ogle, a 22-year-old student at the University of Tennessee, found a secondhand seat for \$30. A new one can cost from about \$35 to as much as \$220. Ogle thought she’d been a savvy consumer, but at the safety-seat checkup in Chattanooga, the young mother got a shock.

“This one’s under recall,” technician Mark Baldwin informed her. The seat’s fabric failed to meet flammability standards, and the seat allowed for too much movement of the child’s head in a crash.

“To think I put my daughter’s life in danger for the past year and a half just to save some money. I feel worse than awful,” the young mother told Reader’s Digest as she paused to look at the two-year-old child giggling in her arms.

A recall could mean anything from incorrect directions to a faulty latch on a harness buckle, and in an accident these defects could result in injury or even death. In the past five years over six million seats have been recalled—but fewer than two million have been replaced or repaired. The rest are most likely still in use.

Recalled seats can be a serious hazard, explains Chattanooga SAFE KIDS coordinator Jamie Case. “People move or never send in their registration card, and then if a recall is announced, they’re never notified.” Recall information, however, is readily available through several help lines and Web sites.

Safety organizations generally discourage the use of seats purchased at resale shops or yard sales, since the device could have sustained structural damage in the past. Additionally, the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association advises against using any seat more than six years old.

A Cocoon of Safety. Thirty-year-old Lisa Webb of Overland Park, Kan., was on her way to the mall last July with her son, Zachary, when she saw the sign “Safety Seat Check Up Today.” Concerned that her two-year-old’s seat wasn’t installed properly, she detoured from her planned shopping and went to the SAFE KIDS checkup site.

Webb’s hunch was right. The harness straps were in the wrong slots, and the seat belt was incorrectly routed through the seat and not properly tightened. Zachary’s harness retainer clip was also below armpit level. Webb was taught how to put the seat in correctly.

Six weeks later Webb was turning left at an intersection on a major four-lane road less than a mile from her home when Zachary called out from the back seat,

“Mommy, watch out!” Before Webb could register what her son was yelling, a pickup truck coming from the opposite direction plowed into her door. The jarring sounds of scraping metal and shattering glass filled the air, and Webb was sent flying across the front seat of the car.

Dazed and in shock, she looked down and saw blood splattered on her arm and T-shirt. “Zachary! Are you all right?” she yelled as she spun her head around. Still solidly belted into his safety seat, the little boy peered back at his mother with wide eyes filled with fright.

Paramedics were on the scene in minutes, and Webb was taken to a hospital with broken ribs, a punctured lung and multiple lacerations. Meanwhile Zachary—virtually unharmed—was picked up by his father. The automobile was totaled.

At the hospital, Webb was visited by Overland Park traffic-safety officers who had been at the crash scene. “We just wanted you to know how much we appreciate your having installed your child seat correctly,” Officer Bill Koehn told her. “It’s a rare thing to come upon an accident and discover a safety seat actually used properly. It’s usually the other way around, and those stories never have happy endings.”

Need Help?

The following sources can aid in product selection, installation and recalls, and can also help locate a certified child passenger safety technician near you:

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
800-424-9393, 888-327-4236 (also toll-free)
www.nhtsa.dot.gov

National SAFE KIDS Campaign
800-441-1888, 202-662-0632, www.safekids.org

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.
800-745-SAFE, 800-747-SANO (Spanish)
www.carseat.org

General Motors’ “Precious Cargo: Protecting the Children Who Ride With You” (free booklet)
800-247-9168

Nissan’s Quest for Safety Campaign “The What to Expect Guide to Car Seat Safety” (free booklet)
800-955-4500

The International Association of Chiefs of Police - Operation Kids 800-843-4227

[Date]

[Contact Name]
[Contact's Title]
[Dealership Name]
[Address]
[City, TX ZIP]

Dear [Contact Name],

[Name of Organization] would like to enlist your support with a Checkup Event we are planning at [Location] on [Date]. The purpose of the event is to educate parents on the correct use of child safety seats and safety belts. With misuse of child safety seats estimated as high as 90%, your sponsorship of the event can truly make a difference.

Previously, we were able to secure grant funding for purchasing the child safety seats needed to conduct such an event. However, we are not eligible for additional grant funding in this fiscal year.

The purpose of this letter is to request your sponsorship with a \$1,000.00 donation to purchase the child safety seats for the event. Please let me know if your organization is able to assist. Checks may be made payable to the [Name of Organization].

Thank you for your consideration in support of this event.

Sincerely,

[Name of Organization's Representative]
[Organization Name]

cc: [Committee Members]

Checking Team Assignments

Event: _____

Date: _____

Senior Checker: _____
(Oversee teams 1, 2, and 3)

Team # 1:
Technician: _____

Scribe: _____

Assistant: _____

Team # 2:
Technician: _____

Scribe: _____

Assistant: _____

Team # 3:
Technician: _____

Scribe: _____

Assistant: _____

Senior Checker: _____
(Oversee teams 4, 5, and 6)

Team # 4:
Technician: _____

Scribe: _____

Assistant: _____

Team # 5:
Technician: _____

Scribe: _____

Assistant: _____

Team # 6:
Technician: _____

Scribe: _____

Assistant: _____

Child Safety Seat Checkup Update

FAX**FAX****FAX**

To: [Name of Certified Technician]

From: [Name of Checkup Coordinator]

Date: [Current Date]

Subject: [Up Coming Child Safety Seat Checkup Event]

[Name of Technician],

Looking forward to working with you one week from today [date] in [town]. The checkup event is scheduled from [time] at [location]. Pre-event briefing will be at [time] at the event site. I am sending you a map of how to reach the event site.

This will be the first checkup event in that community, and [name of media coordinator] has done a tremendous job of promoting the event. Thank you for committing to this event. Your technical expertise and enthusiasm will go a long way in making this event successful.

If you have questions regarding the time, location or other details of the event, please call [name of checkup coordinator] at [phone number].

News Article

Child Safety Seat Checkup Event

There are rear-facing car seats, forward-facing car seats, belt-positioning booster seats and high back booster seats. All these are critical in keeping a child safe in a vehicle, but they are not the most important factor.

According to [*local safety advocate*], “parents are the most important factor in ensuring that children are securely placed in the proper child safety seat for the child and the proper child safety seat for the vehicle.”

On [*date*], the [*organization conducting event*] will conduct a child safety seat checkup event at [*location of event*].

“Four out of five car seats are used incorrectly,” [*local safety advocate*] said.

“You don’t just put it in the car and snap it,” [*he/she*] said. The safety belt must be routed through the correct slots on the child safety seat, and the child safety seat should be secure enough that it doesn’t move more than an inch from side to side or toward the front of the vehicle.

Certified child passenger safety technicians will go over the checkup form with parents and point out what is correct and incorrect with each child safety seat. They will then properly install the child safety seats, take them back out, then allow the parents to re-install them.

Inspections may take up to 30 minutes each, [*he/she*] said, depending on how many pointers are given to the parents.

[*Local Safety Advocate*] said besides buckling a child in properly, there are other measures to take to help ensure child safety. Put bags of groceries in the trunk of a car or in the very back of a sport utility vehicle or van. In a crash, cans and jars can turn into deadly projectiles, [*he/she*] said.

Also, never place an infant in the front seat of a car especially with a passenger side air bag. The safest place for all children 12 and under is the back seat.

For families with more than one child, tips on the safest seat positions for all the children will be given out.

The checkup event, from [*time of event*] on [*day of week*], is free. The [*sponsoring agency*] is working in conjunction with [*list other sponsors*].

For more information on this event, please call [*name and phone number of contact person*].

