

Child Passenger Safety

<http://passengersafety.tamu.edu> & <http://buckleup.tamu.edu>

The Passenger Safety Project at the Texas AgriLife Extension Service works to reduce deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes by increasing the use of child restraints and safety belts. The project's emphasis is on increasing the use of child safety seats across Texas.

Relevance

- Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for children 3-14 years of age.
- For children ages 14 and under, the annual cost of motor vehicle occupant-related death and injury exceeds \$25.8 billion.
- Although safety belts and child restraints are the single-most effective tool in reducing these deaths and injuries, almost half of children killed in vehicle crashes were unrestrained. Minority children are at a greater risk of being unrestrained.
- Misuse and non-use of child restraints remains high, with children ages 5-9 having the lowest usage rate at just 33.4 percent.
- Most parents think they are using child safety seats correctly, but studies show that an estimated 73 percent are used incorrectly. To date, the Passenger Safety Project has overseen the inspection of over 11,000 child safety seats in Texas, seeing a misuse rate of 99 percent.
- Research shows that child restraints, when used properly, reduce the risk of fatal injury.
- From 1975-2007, the lives of an estimated 8,709 children were saved



by the use of child safety seats or adult safety belts. If all child passengers ages 14 and under were restrained properly, an estimated 182,000 serious injuries could be prevented annually.

- Child safety seats are 71 percent effective in reducing fatal injury for infants and 54 percent effective for toddlers.
- Among children ages 14 and under killed as occupants in motor vehicle crashes in Texas in 2007, almost half were not using safety restraints at the time of the collision.
- Lack of access to affordable child safety seats contributes to a lower usage rate among low-income families. However, 95 percent of low-income families who own a child safety seat use it.
- The use of belt-positioning booster seats lowers the risk of injury to children in crashes by 59 percent compared to the use of adult safety belts. The distribution of free seats, accompanied by educational training, can dramatically increase the use of booster seats among children ages 4-8.

Severity of the Problem

- In 2007, 1,670 child occupants ages 14 and under died in motor vehicle crashes, and an estimated 200,000 children were injured as occupants in motor vehicle-related crashes.
- In addition to physical trauma, motor vehicle injuries can have long-lasting psychological effects.
- Minority children are more likely to be fatally injured in car crashes than white children.
- Rural areas have a higher crash incidence and death rate than urban areas.

Response

The Passenger Safety Project is funded through federal funds competitively awarded through the Texas Department of Transportation. Passenger Safety conducts the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's National Child Passenger Safety Technician Training to certify technicians to assist parents with child safety seat education. In 2008, the project trained 49 participants as certified child passenger safety technicians. To date, 569 technicians have been trained, including 95 Extension agents and 182 law enforcement officers. Child safety seat checkup events are primarily conducted in under-served rural areas to educate parents on the correct usage of child safety seats.

Although Passenger Safety reaches a wide variety of audiences across the state, the majority of the clientele are low-income and minority families. In addition to conducting checkup events, child safety seat fitting stations have been established at county Extension offices and fire/EMS departments to allow families easy access to certified technicians. When needed, a replacement seat is issued at no charge to parents and caregivers at child safety seat checkup events and fitting station appointments.

Project-trained technicians deliver educational programs on child passenger safety in their community as well as educate parents one-on-one about the correct installation and usage of their child safety seat. The program is ideal for Extension agents wanting to bring a much needed, visible, and easily measured economic benefit to their counties.

Results

- The proper use of child safety seats reduces the risk of injury and death, leading to reduced medical costs, avoidance of lost future earnings, and improved quality of life.

- These economic benefits are an estimated \$1,820 per child age 0–4 and \$2,130 per child age 4–7 for new seats distributed, and \$505 per child for seat misuse corrected (based on a formula from the Children's Safety Network Economics and Data Analysis Resource Center).
- In 2008, the project supervised over 1,600 inspections and distributed more than 970 child safety seats. To date, the Passenger Safety Project has supervised over 11,000 child safety seat inspections, which has resulted in an estimated \$11.7 million in economic benefits to society.

Success Stories

- "I became a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician five years ago and just learned that I have helped to save the lives of three young children involved in a serious crash. Thank you for teaching me how to make a difference."
– *Health Educator certified at project technician training, November 2008*
- "The checkup gave me peace of mind knowing the car seats are installed correctly." – *Parent at Victoria Checkup Event, March 2006*
- "This is the best training that I have attended with Extension since beginning employment 1.5 years ago. It will enable me to facilitate and provide an important relevant service to the community." – *Extension agent participant at Corsicana Four-Day Technician Training, November 2005*
- "I learned that God has watched over my granddaughter during her 3 years of life because her safety seat wasn't installed properly, and during this course I was able to learn how to install hers and hopefully be able to educate the parent that comes to me on proper installations," – *Participant at Weslaco Four-Day Technician Training, November 2004*

References for this brief are available upon request.

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