The Passenger Safety Project at the Texas A&M 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 correct use of child safety seats across Texas.

**Relevance**

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children age 4 and every age 11 through 14.

- The total annual cost of motor vehicle occupant-related death and injury is $7 billion for children ages 14 and under.
- Safety belts and child restraints are the single most effective tool in reducing these deaths and injuries; however, nationally, 41% of children killed in vehicle crashes are unrestrained. Minority children are at a greater risk of being unrestrained.
- Over the period of 1975 through 2012, an estimated 10,157 lives were saved by child restraints (child safety seats or adult seat belts) for children under the age of 5 in passenger vehicles. At 100% child safety seat use for children under age 5, an estimated 342 lives (that is, an additional 58) could have been saved in 2012.

- Child safety seats are 71% effective in reducing fatal injury for infants and 54% effective for toddlers. The use of belt-positioning booster seats lowers the risk of injury to children in crashes by 59% compared to the use of adult safety belts.
- Lack of access to affordable child safety seats contributes to a lower usage rate among low-income families.
- Misuse and non-use of child restraints remains high, with children ages 5 to 9 having the lowest usage rate. Only 28.6% of Texas 5-9 year olds were correctly restrained in 2014.
- Most parents think they are using child safety seats correctly, but studies show that an estimated three out of four seats are used incorrectly.

**Severity of the Problem**

- An average of 3 children 14 and younger were killed and 462 were injured every day in the United States in motor vehicle crashes during 2012.
- 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 2014, the project trained 33 participants as certified child passenger safety technicians. To date, 795 technicians...
have been trained, including 137 AgriLife Extension agents and 220 law enforcement officers. Child safety seat checkup events are primarily conducted in underserved 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 estimated $2,196 per child age 0 to 4 and $2,610 per child age 4 to 7 for new seats distributed, and $621 per child for seat misuse with an assumed 75% continued use.
- For the 1,852 safety seats inspected in 2014, the economic benefit is estimated at nearly $2.5 million. Since the program’s inception in 1999, the total economic benefit is estimated at $31.9 million.

Success Stories
- “Instructors were superb! Excellent course. Information, instructors, and delivery were second to none! Thanks!” – Participant at Goodfellow Air Force Base Technician Training, November 2010
- “I appreciate the knowledge I’ve learned today on child seat safety; they actually saved my child’s life.” – Parent at Wharton County Checkup Event, October 2010
- “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

References for this brief are available upon request.