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**

- Traffic crashes are one of the leading causes of death for children under age 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; Unfortunately in 2015, less than half of the children killed in vehicle crashes in Texas were known to be restrained.
- Minority children are at a greater risk of being unrestrained. Crash data from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration shows that, on average every 33 seconds, one child under the age of 13 is involved in a crash and nearly two children under age 13 are killed, and 308 are injured every day.
- From 1975 to 2014, an estimated 10,673 lives were saved by child restraints. At 100% child safety seat use for children under age 5, an estimated 289 lives could have been saved in 2014.
- Child safety seats are 71% effective in reducing fatal injuries 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 31.8% percent of Texas 5 to 9 year olds were correctly restrained in 2015.
- Most parents think they are using child safety seats correctly, but studies show that an estimated 3 out of 4 seats are used incorrectly.

**Severity of the Problem**

- In 2015, 340 children under 5 were killed, and 47,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- 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 2016, the project trained 50 participants as certified child passenger safety technicians. To date, 938 technicians have been trained, including 183 Extension agents and 243 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, fire/EMS and law enforcement 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 $2,159 per child age 0 to 4 and $2,606 per child age 4 to 7 for new seats distributed; and $622 per child for seat misuse with an assumed 75% continued use.
- In 2016, 2,227 safety seats were inspected and 1,513 new seats were distributed at no cost to families. The economic benefit is estimated at over $2.92 million. Since the program’s inception in 1999, the total economic benefit for the more than 28,744 inspections conducted and over 19,247 seats distributed is nearly $37.3 million.
- Fifty-two National Child Passenger Safety Technician Trainings have been conducted since the program began with 912 participants trained as certified technicians, including 174 Extension Agents and 239 law enforcement officers.
- Online courses on transportation safety have been completed by more than 45,200 child care staff since 2009 when the courses were first offered.

Success Stories

- “I learned that an 8 year old child, previously incorrectly riding in a seat belt, to whom I issued a booster seat was subsequently in a very serious rollover crash and survived without a scratch! I am so glad that I took the training to be a certified child passenger safety technician!” – Mandi Seaton, Lamb County Extension Agent Technician, August 2013
- “I learned that my child was riding in an expired seat!” – Parent at Johnson County Checkup Event, September 2015
- “I wish I had done this [had my car seat inspected] sooner!” – Parent at Gillespie County Checkup Event, October 2015
- “Now I know that my child should be rear-facing rather than forward-facing. Thank you!” – Parent at Karnes County Checkup Event, October 2015
- “Instructors were the best I have ever had! They inspired me to be passionate about child passenger safety!” – Participant at Odessa Technician Training, November 2015

References for this brief are available upon request.