

NEW POWER WINDOW RULE STILL A THREAT TO YOUNG CHILDREN

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, KIDS AND CARS, Center for Auto Safety, Consumer Federation of America, Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety, Consumers Union, Kids in Cars, 4RKidsSake, Public Citizen, Trauma Foundation, and the Zoie Foundation Ask the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to Reconsider Final Rule

Every year several children are killed and hundreds more injured when power windows close on their necks, heads, arms and hands. Many similar incidents go unreported. All too often, children are left alone in vehicles with power windows that are still working. Children are severely injured and killed when they operate the switch that closes a power window on themselves or another child. Adults also injure children when, without paying attention, they close a power window on a child who is leaning out of the window.

Power windows will close if children accidentally lean on or bump a “rocker” or “toggle” switch, notoriously unsafe designs that readily allow power windows to be unintentionally closed. Even the pull-up-to-close switch designs, which are safer because they do not close a power window just by leaning on them, can be operated by a young child playing with and pulling up on the switch.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently issued a final rule to improve power window safety and to make switches more difficult for children to operate. The agency claimed that the rule will result in a major improvement in child safety, and the public and media were led to believe that the agency had done away with the notoriously unsafe “rocker” and “toggle” switches.

The NHTSA final rule is inadequate for protecting children and fails to correct the basic flaws of the safety standard:

- The final rule attempts to make accidental power window closures more difficult. It does not address the frequent situation in which a child playing with a switch closes a power window on another child, or when an adult unwittingly does so;
- The final rule does not prohibit the unsafe rocker or toggle switch design; it merely requires that, after 2008, these unsafe switches must be recessed – but even then children will still be able to operate those switches;
- The final rule refused to adopt automatic window reversing technology which can prevent deaths and serious injuries to children caused by power windows. These systems can be installed in vehicles for as little as \$50 for four windows for all four doors – and this estimate can be further reduced with an increased volume of installations.
- Automatic reverse technology is already common on many European and Japanese passenger vehicles, and there have been no reports of power window deaths or injuries for vehicles using automatic reverse technology;
- The basic approach of the power window safety standard is flawed because it assumes that there will always be adequate adult supervision when the key is left in the ignition and the power windows are working. However, the deaths and injuries to many children show that the standard needs to be reevaluated;
- In the case of air bags, even though the government advises parents to put children in the back seat, advanced air bag technology is required to protect children from air bag injuries if a child is seated in the front seat – the same should be done to prevent power window deaths and injuries;
- The final rule requires the use of a test device to model a child’s knee that is much larger (60% larger) than the test device the agency advanced in its 1996 proposed rule. The size of children’s knees have not changed in the last 8 years, but this larger test device will allow accidental activation of even the recessed switches by young feet, knees, elbows, and hands.

Petition can be viewed at www.saferoads.org.