



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
AND AUTO SAFETY

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Contact: Sally Greenberg 202-462-6262
Janette Fennell 415-336-9279
Jackie Gillan 202-408-1711

Government Vehicle Backover Report Confirms Urgent Need for Visibility Safety Standard

Safety Groups Urge Enactment of Federal Legislation (S.1948 and HR 2230) in Lame Duck Session to Prevent Unacceptable Death and Injury Toll of Children

A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) report released yesterday on technology to prevent the problem of drivers backing over and killing or injuring children “confirms that there are thousands of injuries and at least 183 deaths each year from backovers because drivers can’t see what’s behind them,” said Janette Fennell, founder and president of KIDS AND CARS. “We need to establish a visibility safety standard for all vehicles.”

The NHTSA report, “Vehicle Backover Avoidance Technology Study,” was released November 13, 2006 in response to a Congressional mandate to study technologies to help drivers detect objects behind them adopted in transportation legislation passed in 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Transportation Efficiency Act, A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). Fennell maintains a database that currently tracks information about children involved in nontraffic incidents, including backovers. “My own research indicates that the number of childhood deaths and injuries caused by backover are even higher and increasing annually. NHTSA used old data from eight years ago that dramatically understates the magnitude of this horrendous problem. The federal government can no longer ignore this problem. The study supports the concerns of safety groups. Too many children are needlessly dying, some technologies marketed to consumers are better than others, and it is time for NHTSA to establish minimum performance standards,” Fennell added.

KIDS AND CARS, Consumers Union and Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety and other groups are pressing Congress for adoption of federal legislation to require a rearward visibility standard for all vehicles. These bills, S. 1948 introduced by Senators Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and John Sununu (R-NH), and the House companion version, HR 2230, introduced by Congressman Peter King (R-NY) and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) are currently awaiting Congressional action. There are over 50 Republican and Democratic co-sponsors.

NHTSA’s report concluded that performance of sensor based aides in detecting child pedestrians was not as effective as camera based systems in their potential to reduce backover incidents. The study also stated that at least 85 percent of those who had systems installed on their vehicles felt they were “effective or very effective at providing warnings about objects sufficiently in advance.”

Debra Balise, of Childrens Hospital Los Angeles recently purchased an Infiniti M45 with a rearview camera. “Working as a nurse in the trauma field, I understand first hand how dangerous a 3,000 pounds vehicle can be as it slowly backs up and the driver cannot see what is behind the vehicle. This new technology clearly shows me what might have gotten in my path after I already checked around the vehicle to make sure no children are present. I would never drive a

vehicle without this life-saving technology again; and think this life saving device should be on every car before it leaves the showroom” she said.

“We applaud NHTSA for taking a close and careful look at the varied technologies available to consumers seeking safety solutions to the tragedy of backover deaths and injuries” said Sally Greenberg, Senior Product Safety Counsel for Consumers Union. “NHTSA’s conclusions are similar to those of Consumer Reports, which tested backover prevention technologies, finding that cameras do a better job in providing drivers with reliable assistance in spotting children or objects behind the vehicle than other existing technologies.” Greenberg added that the legislation she and other safety advocates are backing doesn’t call for any specific technology but instead sets a standard for rearward visibility that all cars would have to meet.

Jackie Gillan, Vice President of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, working to pass the legislation, observed that “congressional action was needed to direct NHTSA to undertake this study and congressional action is needed to direct the agency to issue a federal safety standard. The study confirmed that some vehicles have blind zones that can hide the presence of 20 or 30 children when backing up. The auto industry is selling consumers various backing up systems to address this problem. The report shows that not all technologies are effective. This legislation will not only save children but it will save consumers from spending money on inadequate systems.”

The groups are working with Republican and Democratic legislators to respond to the tragic problem of children being backed over and killed at a rate of 2 a week, according to KIDS AND CARS, with 48 children each week going to hospital emergency rooms for injuries. “NHTSA’s report shows we have the technology to address the problem, now we need the political will to get the legislation passed. Children are precious - we should be doing everything in our power to keep them safe,” Fennell concluded.

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