

September 2006

Working Together to Keep Kids Safe in the Upstate!

Sobering stats: Some 90,000 child passengers age eight or younger are injured or killed in U.S. car accidents each year. More than 40 percent of these children were not restrained in child safety seats (CSS).

Riding unrestrained or improperly restrained in a safety seat is the greatest risk for death and injury among children in motor vehicles. Restraining children in CSS protects them, the driver, and other vehicles on the road. A properly restrained child can reduce the risk of death by up to 70% for an infant and by 50% for a toddler. CSS can also reduce the need for hospitalization by 69% for children ages 4 and under.

There are many reasons why parents choose not to buckle up their children. Many of these problems relate to the lack of knowledge parents have regarding the need for CSS. Other issues facing parents are the difficulty of correctly installing CSS, securing the child in the seat correctly, and knowing which type of seat (infant, convertible, or booster) a child should use.

In an effort to educate parents and increase awareness about this issue, the National Automobile Dealer's Association (NADA), Safe Kids Upstate, and Greenville Hospital System Children's Hospital partnered together to host the largest Child Safety Seat Check-Up Event in South Carolina's history.

On Wednesday, September 13, at the Greenville Drive's West End Field, 229 seats were inspected, in a 4-hour, rain drenching period, by certified car seat technicians. 102 car seats were given to families who needed them. Many seats were out of date, or recalled. More than one-third of the attendees were at risk, low-income families who could not afford a new seat.

At this check, 93% of child safety seats were installed incorrectly. Three common errors identified in CSS installations were 1) car seat not belted into vehicle tightly, 2) safety seat harness straps not snug, and, 3) harness retainer clip not at armpit level.

Although the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends booster seats for four- to eight-year-olds, less than 10 percent of children ride in them.

Kids this age usually have outgrown toddler seats, but often are too small to be safely restrained by adult seat belts alone. Yet "so many people think that once [the child is] out of the car seat, the seat belts are sufficient," says Linda Brees, Manager, Safe Kids Upstate, led by Greenville Hospital System Children's Hospital.

NADA Chairman William Bradshaw says that “parents will do the right thing if they have the right information. Unfortunately, many parents don’t have the right information when it comes to child safety seats—that’s why the NADA has named September as Child Passenger Safety Month and partnered with Safe Kids Upstate and Greenville Hospital System Children’s Hospital to increase awareness about this important issue.

Wednesday’s Check-Up Event provided 1) a means to distribute seats to parents and caregivers that don’t have a CSS; 2) hands-on installation skills training to parents; 3) general child passenger safety knowledge and local and state laws concerning CSS; and 4) a variety of interactive safety exhibits to educate parents and children on motor vehicle safety.

More than 120 volunteers participated at this Check-Up event. Safe Kid’s Certified Car Seat Technicians came from across the state, and two from Florida, to provide families in the Upstate with experts on child passenger safety. Other volunteers assisted families at registration, hosted children’s activities or held babies while parents learned to install their seats.

Some of the activities that kids enjoyed were: face painting, a balloon artist, the Wheel of Safety Game, Fishing Game (preventing poisoning), Bouncy Slide, Mascot Parade (led by Dora the Explorer from Nickelodeon), the Greenville Greyhounds cheerleaders and their mascot dogs, and much more. Parents registered for doorprizes from the Greenville Marriott and the Greenville Drive. Families and the media enjoyed the car seat crushing demonstration. Bull dozers crushed more than 100 old or damaged seats, so that they will no longer be in circulation at yard sales or thrift stores.

Safe Kids Upstate operates four Child Safety Seat Inspection Stations in the Upstate where parents can have their CSS inspected and learn how to install the CSS properly. For information on how to make an appointment call (864) 454-1109. For more information, visit our website at www.safekidsupstate.org.