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Contact: Janette Fennell, KIDS AND CARS, (913) 327-0013
Sally Greenberg, Consumers Union, (202) 462-6262

FACT SHEET ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION TO PREVENT INJURIES AND DEATHS TO CHILDREN LEFT UNATTENDED IN AND AROUND VEHICLES

KIDS AND CARS and Consumers Unions are working with members of Congress to pass legislation that will direct the Secretary of Transportation to establish a database on injuries and deaths in nontraffic, noncrash incidents, to establish a child safety information program, and to issue regulations to reduce the incidence of child injury and death occurring inside or outside of motor vehicles. These regulations include a power window safety standard, driver reminder system, and rearward visibility standard.

The following figures are based on data collected by the Kansas-based national child safety organization, KIDS AND CARS. The tragedies cross all socio-economic levels, often while the child is in the care of well-meaning parents and caregivers.

- At least **165 children died** in nontraffic, noncrash vehicle-related incidents in **2004**, of which **101 died when backed over** by a motor vehicle, frequently driven by a parent or relative.
- **Since 2000, 723 children under the age of 15 have died** in nontraffic, noncrash incidents
- **Backovers and hyperthermia claim the most lives**; among others, the remaining causes include power window strangulation and the car being set in motion by the child
- KIDS AND CARS documented 561 backover incidents from 1994 to 2004, primarily involving children under the age of 4, and found that:
 - A death occurred in 392 of the 561 incidents.
 - The victims were predominantly one year olds. (12-23 months)
 - Over 60% of backing up incidents involved a large passenger vehicle (truck, van or sport utility vehicle).
 - In over 70% of the incidents, a parent or close relative was behind the wheel.

CDC study on backovers: A February 2005 National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study examined the threat posed to children from motor vehicle backover-related injuries, declaring backover incidents a “substantial risk for severe injury and death” to children:

- An estimated 7,475 children from ages one to 14 fourteen years were treated in U.S. emergency departments between 2001 and 2003 for nonfatal backover-related injuries.
- Serious injuries, including fractures and internal injuries, account for 39.5% of rollover injuries among children aged one to four years.
- 28.0% of backover injuries occurred to the head, face, and neck region, while 53.6% occurred to arms and legs.
- “Automobile modifications may play a role in preventing backover-related injuries among children and youth and should be evaluated for their effectiveness.”

Backover prevention with rearward visibility: Technology is available from independent vendors to help prevent backing incidents. One system features an automotive camera technology that provides drivers a rearview image on a small video screen when the vehicle is in reverse. Another, offered by a

chain of automotive dealerships, uses a Doppler radar sensor mounted at the rear of the vehicle to detect the presence of “objects or people” and alerts driver with beeps and flashing lights. A third technology is a talking device that tells drivers how close they are to an object while in reverse. Finally, another system uses four ultrasonic sensors and an audible dynamic alarm inside the vehicle to warn the driver of objects behind the vehicle. Technology that original automotive equipment manufacturers offer to assist in backing up is found largely in high-end vehicles and is intended to assist the driver in parking maneuvers.

The call for backover prevention: A J.D. Power survey (ITS, July 1, 2001) of 10,000 consumers found that 72% would like to have external sensing aids on their vehicle and would be willing to pay an additional \$300 for the technology.

Power windows: According to KIDS AND CARS, power windows in automobiles have killed or injured thousands of children. Between 1992 and 2004, at least thirty-seven children have been killed by power-windows, most of them age 3 and younger. According to a May 1997 *Research Note* published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), of 499 total cases of injury caused by power windows between October 1993 and September 1994, 64% of the victims were under the age of 14. While most American cars overseas have the necessary preventative power window features, these safety features are not available to U.S. consumers, as automakers largely place the blame on the parents. Nevertheless, after the deaths of 54 children from 1982 to 1992 due to garage doors, federal law mandated the installation of the garage door auto-reverse feature (similar to power window auto-reverse technology) in 1993.

Hyperthermia prevention reminder system: According to KIDS AND CARS, about 24% of nontraffic, noncrash fatalities result from children being left unattended in an overheated car. Technology is available to alert parents, caregivers and passersby when a child is left unattended in a vehicle. NASA, for example, has developed a system that sends a signal to an alarm module on the driver’s key ring if the driver moves too far away from the vehicle with a child still in a car seat.

No current database: NHTSA does not currently maintain a database for non-traffic vehicle-related incidents and fatalities; KIDS AND CARS is the clearinghouse for such data collection. The absence of a federal data-gathering role inevitably means that the incidents are underreported. NHTSA has the jurisdiction to collect these data, but does not do so because the agency has historically focused on traffic-related crashes that occur on public highways and roads.

Unaware of the fatal consequences: KIDS AND CARS has found that well-meaning parents and caregivers are often not aware of the potentially deadly consequences of leaving children unattended in or around cars. KIDS AND CARS research indicates that the practice of leaving children unattended in cars, often for a short period of time, takes place thousands of times every day. The parents and caregivers believe that for the short periods that they run errands, for example, their children are safe. KIDS AND CARS data demonstrates how this error in judgment may produce tragic, fatal consequences. KIDS AND CARS therefore also supports an educational campaign to accompany federal legislative action to highlight the dangers to children left unattended in and around motor vehicles.

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