



Janette E. Fennell  
President and Founder  
KidsAndCars.org  
(913) 327-0013  
[Janette@KidsAndCars.org](mailto:Janette@KidsAndCars.org)

### **New report undercounts statistics regarding children left behind in hot cars**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) released its first-ever “Not-in-Traffic Surveillance 2007 - Children” report on Tuesday, conclusively confirming that preventable deaths and injuries associated with motor vehicles happen with regularity every year, not only on public roadways, but on private driveways and in parking lots. The safety agency report estimates that thousands of tragic and life-altering incidents occurred in 2007 due to children being backed over, powerful automatic vehicle windows closing on necks and limbs of car occupants and by children being left alone in hot vehicles.

Janette Fennell, founder and president of KidsAndCars.org, the national nonprofit organization advocating for child and automotive safety said, “This is an important day, one that has been long overdue. The release of this report solidifies once and for all that attention must be focused on making cars safer for children...no matter where an incident takes place. These data confirm what parents and safety groups have known for years . . . that too many children are being killed in their own driveways and parking lots by the very people who love them the most and nothing was being done to prevent these needless tragedies.”

Though NHTSA’s report correctly identifies heat stroke (hyperthermia) as the number one cause of death when children are left alone **inside** motor vehicles; their data seriously undercounts the actual number of children who die in this manner. Their message is correct; but the data appear to be understated. “Our data confirms an average of 37 hyperthermia fatalities per year; not the 27 estimated by the agency” states Fennell. It’s important for the public to clearly understand the magnitude of this issue. One child dies every 10 days in this country due to vehicular hyperthermia.

The release of the NHTSA report is very timely because parents need factual information about ways to protect their children this summer. Already, six children have perished due to heat stroke this year; with two in the last two days. An inquisitive toddler died after entering his mother’s vehicle in Rhode Island and a 4-month-old infant perished in California after his father unknowingly forgot to drop him at daycare.

Numerous solutions exist today to help prevent these tragedies and KidsAndCars.org hopes the government will work diligently and as quickly as possible to put the regulations and education programs in place to make these types of injuries and deaths a thing of the past.

KidsAndCars.org is proposing Federal legislation that would help to save the lives of thousands of children and put an end to children being unintentionally left behind in a motor vehicle. The legislation would require automakers to install seat belt sensors (like the ones already found in the driver’s

and front passenger seats) for all rear seating positions. Rear seatbelt sensors would let the driver know that everyone in the back seat is buckled up; or when a passenger unbuckles themselves. Statistics confirm that 40-50% of children who die in auto crashes are not buckled and this legislation would save thousands of lives.

Once the sensors are required, it would be very easy to program the sensors and/or seatbelts to alert a driver that someone is still in the vehicle when they are locking their vehicle. This would be similar to the warning we receive when we've left our keys in the ignition or our headlights on. This strategy should be effective because data tells us that many people feel something like this "could never happen to them" and may not think they need to purchase aftermarket technology. However, these types of incidents do not discriminate. The biggest challenge we face is to help people understand that given the right set of circumstances, this can happen to anyone.

Passage of the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act in 2007 was the pivotal moment in changing how our society thinks about these terrible events. Signed by the President in February 2008, this is the only Transportation bill passed in this country since 2005. This legislation, among other key provisions, directed NHTSA for the first time to collect data about motor vehicle incidents that take place off the public roads and highways.

For additional information regarding the significant dangers children face in and around motor vehicles, visit [www.KidsAndCars.org](http://www.KidsAndCars.org)  
NHTSA "Not-in-Traffic Surveillance 2007 - Children" report: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811116.PDF>

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