Leaving Children Unattended in Vehicles

Staggering Statistics:

2002 has been a deadly year so far for children. Nationwide there have been 288 incidents of children left unattended in or around motor vehicles. Three-hundred ninety-four victims had to receive medical treatment, and 91 children have died.

Nationally the focus has been on child safety in motor vehicles; children riding properly restrained. However, an increased risk for injury and death are a result of children who are left unattended in or around motor vehicles that are not running.

KIDS 'N CARS is developing a national database to evaluate the circumstances and consequences of leaving children unattended in or around vehicles. Since 1997, 445 children have died as a result of being left unattended in cars.

Types of Incidents of fatal injuries among children left unattended in motor vehicles:

- 34.6% left in vehicle in hot weather
- 26.9% backed over by vehicle
- 9.0% truck entrapment
- 12.8% vehicle put in motion by child
- 16.7% Other

Children should never be left alone inside of your car, even for a few minutes. From 1996 through 2000, more than 130 children – most of them ages 3 and younger – died from heat stroke after being trapped in a car.

In the summer of 1999, an average of one child every four days died after being trapped in a car parked in the searing heat. This is a particular problem in Las Vegas, where the “Car-momitor” can easily reach 140 degrees in July and August. But temperatures much lower kill babies every year.

Many parents mistakenly think they can leave a child in a vehicle while running a “quick” errand. Unfortunately a delay of just a few minutes can lead to tragedy. Heat is much more dangerous to children than it is to adults. When left in a hot vehicle, a young child’s core body temperature can increase three to five times faster than that of an adult causing permanent injury or death.

“Extreme heat affects infants and small children disproportionately,” said Martin Eichelberger, M.D., director of trauma surgery at Children’s National Medical Center and president of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. “Heat rapidly overwhelms the body’s ability to regulate temperature. In a closed environment, the body can go into shock and circulation to vital organs will begin to fail.”

There is a need for a law to raise public awareness about the dangers of leaving children unattended inside motor vehicles.

The chart on the next page demonstrates the disproportionate rate of deaths to children under the age of three.

Eleven states have Kids in Cars Laws.
- California
- Connecticut
- Florida
- Illinois
- Kentucky
- Maryland
- Missouri
- Nebraska
- Pennsylvania
- Texas
- Washington

States where laws are currently proposed:
- Georgia
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Michigan
- New Jersey
- Rhode Island
- Tennessee

In Nevada, State Senator Valerie Wiener will be introducing a bill that will hold adults responsible for leaving children unattended in a motor vehicle.
This Chart is Part of the Educational Materials from the National SAFE KIDS Campaign:

**Vehicle heat-related deaths among children**

- Between 1996-2001, at least 150 children died of heatstroke in the passenger compartment of parked vehicles in the U.S.
- Children three and under accounted for more than 90 percent of the deaths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 1 year</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 years and over</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: General Motors Safety Center

In the Nevada Law fines will be given when adults put the health and safety of a child in danger.

- A fine will be levied against the violator of not more than $300.

This fine may be waived or reduced if the person presents proof to the court, that he has successfully completed an educational program including information concerning the dangers of leaving a child unattended in a motor vehicle.

- The offender class will be offered by the Clark County SAFE KIDS Coalition.

**Educating parents and adults that it is not acceptable to leave children unattended is a starting point.**

**Parents need to:**

- Lock their vehicle when they are at home. Children like to play hide and seek. What started as a game ends as a prison cell that the child cannot get out of.
- Children like to pretend to drive - Don’t leave your keys in the ignition.
- Children like to play around cars. Check to make sure children are clear of the vehicle before backing up.
- Children want to run up to say good-bye as an adult is leaving. Be aware of a child darting out in front of you.

The deaths and injuries caused by children unattended in motor vehicles are predictable and preventable. Well-meaning parents and care givers of all socioeconomic levels leave children unattended in motor vehicles everyday for a variety of reasons, but primarily because they are unaware of the dangers.