

Responses to Media

UPDATE (18 Jan 2007): Consumer Reports has issued a retraction of their article rating Infant Car Seats: CONSUMER REPORTS WITHDRAWS INFANT CAR SEAT REPORT

Many of you have likely heard about the recent Consumer Reports article "Safety Alert: What if this were your child?" (Consumer Reports, February 2007) In this report, Consumer Reports (CR) claims that most infant car seats on the American market fail to protect children in side impact crashes. The Car Seat Ladies question the scientific validity of CR's conclusions. Amongst the 3 Car Seat Ladies (Debbi, Alisa, and Emily) we have installed at least 20,000 car seats over the past nearly 20 years. Our experience indicates that car seats, especially when used properly, are extremely effective at preventing injury and death - in even the worst of crashes. We have seen first hand numerous of "our babies" (those whose seats we helped their parents install) come away from highway speed crashes involving severe rollovers without even a bruise. Were the infant seats as unsafe as Consumer Reports purports, we would have seen this reflected in real-world experience -- but, we haven't.

We feel that the current frontal crash test mandated by NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) is adequate & since it is more severe than approximately 98% of recorded frontal impact crashes nationwide. We support side-impact testing of car seats, which is currently not required in the U.S. However, we feel that the CR test at 38mph is likely not the best test; in Australia the side-impact test for car seats is performed at 20mph. Redesigning the seats to pass the 38 mph CR side-impact test may not make seats safer in real-world crashes&and may even make the situation worse. Both NHTSA and the University of Michigan Traffic Research Institute agree that the design changes necessary to meet a higher crash speed may lead to the production of seats that are less effective in lower speed collisions & which are the most frequent type of crashes & and/or are more difficult to properly install, leading to a net decrease in safety for the majority of crashes.

The CR claim that seats perform worse when attached with LATCH is so far not borne out by real-world data. Currently, the largest available source of information on children in real world crashes comes from the Partners for Child Passenger Safety study (www.chop.edu/injury). Less than one percent of crashes reported to PCPS involved infants in rear-facing seats in side-impact crashes & with a risk of injury of less than one-half of one percent. There was no evidence of a difference in risk of injury whether the seat was attached by the vehicle seat belt or LATCH. It is important to note that injuries sustained by these children were not necessarily caused by a child restraint that came loose, as was seen in the tests conducted by Consumer's Union.

The fact remains that child restraints are highly effective at reducing death and serious injury in the real world. To the extent that the Consumer Reports story undermines confidence in use of these restraints, it does the public a disservice. The Car Seat Ladies feel comfortable continuing to recommend the infant seats that CR found "unsafe" & including the Graco Safe Seat amongst others. We do not see a need for parents to stop using their infant seats - or to go out and purchase a Graco Snug Ride with EPS or Baby Trend Flex Loc as CR recommends doing.

Nonetheless, every parent must make their own decision based on what they feel to be the best for their child. For those who still remain concerned, it's likely best to switch to a rear-facing convertible seat - which a baby can use from the day he/she is born. The convertible seat offers no risk of separation since it is all one piece (unlike an infant seat with a base). Another option is to use the infant carrier without the base (making sure that you properly install the carrier every time you use it).

Key Points for continued safety:

For All Kids:

- Use a car seat on every trip - even in a taxi. Studies show that most crashes involving children happen under "usual driving circumstances" when you aren't going far and aren't going fast. 76% of crashes involving children happen on roads with speed limits of 45mph or less, 91% happen within 30 minutes of home (60% happen within 10 minutes of home), and more than half (56%) happen on local roads.

- Don't rush to "graduate" your child to the next stage - graduation is a demotion in safety.

- Make sure your child's harness straps are "snug like a hug." Be careful of snowsuits and jackets--these add too much bulk that in a crash will increase the chance of injury. A child's harness straps should feel just as snug without the coat as they do with the coat (without making any adjustments between wearing and not wearing the coat). Our video will teach you how to adjust the harness straps properly.

For kids in rear-facing seats:

- Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. Kids who are rear-facing are up to 4 times safer than those who are forward-facing. While most kids outgrow their infant seats around 6-9 months (exception: Graco Safe Seat or Cosco Opus 35), most kids will not outgrow their convertible seat rear-facing until 2-3 years of age.
- If you are using an infant seat with a base, make sure to check that the carrier has fully locked into the base by pulling up on the carrier - once on each side. Do not rely on simply hearing the carrier click in.

For kids in forward-facing car seats:

- Use the tether strap on your car seat - ALL forward facing car seats have a tether strap. Using the tether will decrease how far your child's head moves forward by as much as 8 inches! If your vehicle is a 2000 or newer the tether anchors are factory installed - check the owner's manual to your vehicle for information on where they are located in your vehicle. If your vehicle is pre-2000, you can get the tether anchor installed either for free or for a minimal cost (usually \$15).
- Keep your child in a car seat until they are AT LEAST 40 pounds AND 3-4 years old AND mature enough to sit still in a booster seat.

For kids in booster seats:

- Use a booster seat until your child can pass the 5-step test.
- High back boosters offer 59% more protection in side impact crashes than backless boosters - so if possible use a high back booster whenever possible. (Backless boosters still offer great protection, so if you need a seat for travel, a backless booster is a great choice.)

Car Seat Manufacturers Responses to the Consumer Reports Article

Graco

Britax

Evenflo

Combi

Other Responses

American Academy of Pediatrics

SeatCheck.org and Chrysler Group

Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association

Partners for Child Passenger Safety

This month's issue of Consumer Reports (CR) features an article questioning the performance of certain rear-facing infant car seats, particularly with respect to the use of LATCH to secure the infant seat base to the vehicle's seat. The high-severity frontal and side sled tests conducted by Consumers Union in the lab found that most car seats performed poorly in either one or both of the tests and performed worse when attached to the vehicle using LATCH than they did when attached with the vehicle's seat belt.

The Partners for Child Passenger Safety (PCPS) research team at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia supports the need for further research into the effectiveness of LATCH to protect children of all ages. As LATCH becomes more prevalent, we will be able to conduct analyses of the effectiveness of LATCH to protect children in real-world crashes. The PCPS team further supports the development of a side impact test procedure for child restraints that accurately simulates real world crash conditions. In the meantime, it is important for parents to place findings such as those reported in CR in perspective: children riding in the correct restraint for their age and size are far safer than if they were not restrained at all, or in a restraint that is inappropriate for their age or size.

The most current data from PCPS, which is the largest available source of information on children involved in real world crashes, shows:

- Less than one percent of crashes reported to PCPS since 1997 involved infants in rear-facing seats in side-impact crashes. Among these cases, the risk of injury was less than one-half of one percent – with no evidence of a difference whether the seat was attached by LATCH or by the vehicle seat belt. It is important to note, however, that injuries sustained by these children were not necessarily caused by a child restraint that came loose, as was seen in the tests conducted by Consumer's Union.
- Previous PCPS analyses indicate that side impact crashes generally have higher injury rates than frontal impacts for all passengers, including children restrained in child restraints. Children in forward-facing restraints in side-impact crashes showed a few common characteristics of the crashes that resulted in injury: intrusion into the child's occupant space, a frontal component of the crash (rather than a 90-degree side-impact collision); and rotation of the child restraint towards the side of impact. Many of these characteristics are challenging to simulate in a sled test like the one implemented by Consumers Union.

Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety, Inc.

January 4, 2007

CHILD SAFETY SEATS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN REAL WORLD CRASHES ACCORDING TO AUTOMOTIVE COALITION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Consumer Reports Conclusions Not Based on Real World Experience

(Washington, DC) - The Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS) reminds all parents and caregivers to properly secure young children in age and size-appropriate child safety seats whenever they are in a motor vehicle despite media reports that many rear-facing infant seats did not perform well in Consumer Reports tests.

"The Federal Government's research shows that infant seats are highly effective, reducing fatal injuries to infants by 71 percent in passenger cars and by 59 percent in pickup trucks, minivans and SUVs," said ACTS president Phil Haseltine. "While product testing is important, the ultimate test of a safety device is how it performs in a real-world crash." Consumer Reports has apparently not shared details of its test procedures with manufacturers or other researchers.

Safety belts and LATCH system connectors are both effective methods of installing child safety seats in vehicles. Both the child safety seat instructions and the vehicle owner's manual should be carefully followed to ensure a secure installation. LATCH attachments are not available in all seating positions and using safety belts to install the child restraint may result in a tighter installation, depending on the specific child safety seat and vehicle seat in which it is being installed. Parents should try installing a child safety seat in their vehicle before buying it to ensure a proper fit.

"While LATCH attachments are still relatively new to the marketplace, I am not aware of any scientific data identifying problems with LATCH attachments in crashes," Haseltine added. "In fact, anecdotal reports suggest that LATCH is performing well in real world crashes." (LATCH stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children)

ACTS is a nonprofit organization funded by motor vehicle manufacturers that educates the public and policymakers about traffic safety issues, particularly those associated with occupant restraint systems and other vehicle safety technologies. ACTS has long been involved in child passenger safety issues. In 1995, Mr. Haseltine served as moderator of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Restraints and Vehicle Compatibility. The panel's recommendations resulted in the development and adoption of the LATCH system. Subsequently, ACTS has led numerous panels and symposia addressing booster seat use and safety belt use by older children and teens.