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Occupant Protection for Children

Best Practices Manual



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the U.S., motor vehicle crashes are the single greatest cause of fatalities for children three and older.¹ Across the country, highway safety officials and child safety advocates have recognized the need to boost efforts at increasing the proper use of occupant protection for children (OPC). The challenge is to do this under difficult circumstances where competing issues take higher priority, staff resources are limited or nonexistent, the need is not always considered a priority among policy makers, and funding for OPC is hard to come by.

To meet this challenge, State Farm Insurance Company has teamed with the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) to provide resources, including the development of this “Guide to Occupant Protection for Children”, in support of a comprehensive and balanced approach to improving OPC. This guide follows previously developed comprehensive guidelines and an assessment tool for OPC. The guidelines create a standard for an ideal OPC program. The assessment tool provides a mechanism for state highway safety offices to review all aspects of their OPC program and help focus resources where they are most needed.

This ongoing development for OPC recognizes that the historical focus of state and community programs for children has been infants, toddlers and children four years of age and under. The expansion of booster seat programs and booster seat legislation has expanded the focus on children up to approximately the age of eight. This continues to leave a substantial gap for children who fall between a booster seat program and traditional driver education programs – those children between approximately age eight and 16.

This guide complements available resources to assist state and/or community programs provide a comprehensive approach to occupant protection for children, particularly among those between eight and 16. The guide represents the next step toward a stronger, data-driven and research-based program. It provides examples of various program components that can be replicated and localized in other parts of the country.

A comprehensive program is multi-faceted and complex. There are excellent resources available for child passenger safety programs in support of car seat and booster seat use. Therefore, covering all components of a comprehensive program is beyond the scope of this guide. Based on the responses to a nationwide questionnaire sent to highway safety officials and child passenger safety advocates, this guide focuses primarily on establishing a strategic and comprehensive approach to OPC. Plus, it provides information and resources particularly for the top five priority areas for which the respondents requested additional information:

- programs for “tweens”,
- funding and resources,
- marketing strategies,
- data and evaluation, and
- law enforcement.

Each of these areas makes its own unique demands on commitment, creativity, communication, and cooperation. The projects selected for inclusion in this guide are intended to serve as examples only, in order to illustrate one or more of these essential ingredients. They provide “real world” examples of what can be accomplished when people come together to achieve a common goal – reducing injuries and saving children’s lives.

¹ “Traffic Safety Facts,” National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, January 2006, p. 1.