



NEWS RELEASE

Andy Skoogman, Director of Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 10, 2009

CONTACT:

Nathan Bowie, 651-201-7571

Lisa Husom, 651-201-7570

4 CHILD TRAFFIC DEATHS IN 2009 — NONE RESTRAINED
*Public Safety Stresses Booster Seats and the Most Common
Child Seat Mistakes during Child Passenger Safety Week, Sept. 12–18*

ST. PAUL — Preliminary 2009 crash facts from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) reveal that none of four children under age 7 killed in crashes this year were properly restrained and seven of 10 children seriously injured were also not in a safety restraint. DPS officials are underscoring this news and encouraging all parents and caregivers to make sure their children are riding in the correct restraint and that it is properly secured during national Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Week, Sept. 12–18. Officials are also using the week to remind Minnesotans of the state’s new booster seat law that became effective July 1.

In Minnesota, 83 percent of child restraints are used incorrectly, meaning children are riding in the wrong restraint or it is not properly secured. During 2004–2008, 41 children under age 7 were killed on state roads and 59 percent of these children were either unrestrained or improperly restrained. During that same time period, 14 of the 17 children ages 4–7 — prime ages for booster seat use —killed in crashes were not properly restrained in a child safety seat or booster seat.

Under Minnesota’s new booster seat law, a child cannot ride in a seat belt alone until they are

8 years old or reach 4 feet 9 inches tall — whichever comes first. DPS recommends keeping a child in a booster seat based on their height rather than their age.

Boosters are for children that have outgrown a forward-facing seat, usually around 40 pounds and age 4. A booster seat lifts a child up so a seat belt fits properly. Poor seat belt fit can contribute to serious injury — such as internal decapitation — ejection and death in traffic crashes. Heather Darby, CPS coordinator at DPS Office of Traffic Safety says a sign that a seat belt does not fit properly and a booster is needed is if a child wraps the shoulder belt behind them to avoid the belt rubbing against their neck. The fine for booster seat non-use is \$50, but can cost more than \$100 with administrative fees.

—MORE—

- Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement
- Bureau of Criminal Apprehension
- Driver and Vehicle Services
- Emergency Communication Networks
- Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Minnesota State Patrol
- Office of Communications
- Office of Justice Programs
- Office of Traffic Safety
- State Fire Marshal

Sept. 10, 2009

“Many parents lead busy lives, but it is so important not to put our schedules ahead of safety,” says Darby. “We need to take care of our most precious cargo — our children — and properly secure them in the appropriate child restraint, and set a good example by buckling up as well.”

Darby says a major issue with child passenger safety is that parents are not aware of the restraint steps a child should progress through as they age and grow: rear-facing infant seats, forward-facing toddler seats, booster seats, and seat belts. Darby says the back-to-school period is an ideal reminder for parents and caregivers to refresh their CPS skills and ensure their child seats are properly installed.

The most common child passenger safety mistakes are:

Turning a child from a rear-facing restraint to a forward-facing restraint too soon.

Restraint is not secured tight enough — the seat should not shift more than one inch side-to-side or out from the seat.

Harness on the child is not tight enough — if you can pinch harness material, it’s too loose.

Retainer clip is up too high or too low — should be at the child’s armpit level.

The child is in the wrong restraint — children must progress through different restraints as they age and grow; most often parents/caregivers neglect to use booster seats and “rush” children into adult seat belts that don’t properly fit the child. Use a booster seat until the child is 8 years old, unless the child is 4’9” or taller.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to visit DPS’s www.buckleupkids.state.mn.us website for materials including the “Buckle Up Kids” and “Don’t Skip a Step” brochures that provide detail on how to properly secure a child in a vehicle.

###

Editor’s Note: To arrange an interview with a CPS expert contact Nathan.Bowie@state.mn.us /651-201-7571 or Lisa.Husom@state.mn.us /651-201-7570.