

For immediate release
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Father's Day Tragedies Prompt Safety Warnings

TORRANCE, CA (Tuesday, June 21, 2011)

Safety advocates are putting parents on alert after two California families were devastated this Father's Day weekend when their children were killed after being backed over by their fathers.

Eleven-month-old Christian Guzman died Father's Day morning in Roseville, CA, after his father backed over him in the family's SUV while moving the car just a few feet down the driveway. The previous day, an eighteen-month-old girl was killed when her father backed over her, also in the driveway of the family home.

"Our hearts go out to these families," said Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., a non-profit that campaigns to keep children safe in the car. "Children are very quick and unpredictable, and parents and caregivers are frequently distracted by the many tasks they have to do. A door that didn't latch properly, a mom momentarily distracted, and suddenly, a child is in mortal danger right on the family driveway. It can happen to anyone."²

"Unfortunately, such tragedies are much more common than most people realize," Tombrello says. "Sadly, there are about fifty of these cases **every week** across the country. All vehicles have a blind spot to the front and rear where a child can't be seen by the driver. In larger vehicles, drivers may not be able to see children as far behind the car as 60 feet. Parents, grandparents, and all drivers need to be aware of the risk."

Safety advocates emphasize that it's not enough to assume that kids are where they should be when moving a vehicle. The following steps are recommended to prevent these tragedies:

- Walk around your vehicle before moving it. It only takes a few seconds but would prevent many deaths.
- Make sure that whoever is supervising the children knows that you are going out to move the car, and that all the children are being watched.

- Teach children not to stand near parked vehicles. Explain that drivers cannot see them if they are too close to the vehicle. Never let children play around or behind vehicles, and don't keep toys on the driveway.
- Install a rear view camera or similar warning device. A \$50 camera installed in her car by a SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. staff member saved the life of a toddler who wandered away from his distracted mother in a supermarket parking lot and ended up directly behind the wheel of her car just as she was about to back up. The cameras are an extremely effective prevention measure; in fact, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration studies indicate that such cameras are the only devices that prevented backovers.
- If you don't have a camera, measure the size of your blind zone behind and in front of your vehicle. You might be surprised to find out how large it is.

New regulations to require backup cameras to be fitted to all passenger vehicles from 2014 are currently being considered by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. NHTSA estimates that the change could prevent nearly 300 deaths each year, with the greatest reduction in deaths of children under 5 and the elderly.

Tombrello reminds parents that backovers aren't the only danger to children around cars, especially during the summer heat. "2010 was the worst year on record for deaths of children in cars through heat stroke, with 49 killed. So far in 2011, we have already had 10 deaths. Parents need to know that a car can heat up to fatal temperatures very quickly – within five to ten minutes – and that these tragedies most often happen when families change routine. A common scenario for such sad events occurs when the parent who usually drives straight to work unexpectedly has to drop the child off at day care one morning. Again, take active steps to prevent it – buckle your briefcase or purse into the back seat so that you are forced to check the back before you leave the car. Don't think it can't happen to you. If you've ever mislaid your keys, or accidentally left the stove on, it can."

Kids and Cars provides helpful tips to reduce non-traffic risks to children in and around cars at www.kidsandcars.org. For information on protecting children with safety seats and safety belts, contact Stephanie Tombrello at 310-222-6860 or stombrello@carseat.org or go to www.carseat.org.