

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
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A Little-Recognized Risk to Children, Parent-involved DUI, Highlighted by Santa Barbara Crash

TORRANCE, CA (May 22, 2013) – Safety advocates are again highlighting the problem of DUI drivers travelling with children after a child was seriously injured in Santa Barbara.

The three-year-old boy suffered multiple injuries, including a broken neck, after his mother crashed into a lamppost. Police had earlier been called to a restaurant after reports of a disturbance being caused by the mother and her friend, both of whom allegedly were heavily intoxicated. The mother has been arrested for felony DUI and felony child endangerment. A child safety seat used by the boy at the time of the crash was found to have been incorrectly installed in the car.

The scenario is all too familiar to Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. “Almost 400 kids die on our roads each year in DUI-involved crashes, and many more are injured. Twenty-five percent of the crashes that kill children involve alcohol. Most of these kids aren’t placed at risk by a stranger but by a person responsible for their welfare – often a parent.”

Children become affected by the tragedy of DUI in many ways. Often children are victims of chaotic family situations where parents or caregivers are alcohol- or drug-dependent, leading to multiple risks being faced by their vulnerable children. Custodial parents may find themselves unable to prevent their children being driven by alcohol-abusing non-custodial

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parents. Many drivers are unaware of the extent to which they are likely still to be affected by alcohol the day after a drinking session, putting their children at risk by driving on the morning after.

The trauma suffered by children makes Tombrello angry. “Children rarely can determine whether or not they get in a car with an impaired driver. Too many kids are killed or injured by the actions of people who should protect them. These deaths and injuries are entirely preventable. Never drive after drinking. If you are a parent and you have a substance abuse problem, stop putting your children at risk and get treatment. If you know your partner has a substance abuse problem, make sure you never, ever allow your child to travel with him or her while under the influence. Act now — before your child becomes another DUI statistic.”

Supported by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. is campaigning to reduce the number of children killed or injured in DUI-related incidents by making parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies aware that impaired drivers are especially dangerous when driving with children. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends that:

- Enhanced penalties should be faced by DUI drivers who drive with children in the car.
- Child endangerment charges should be brought against parents who allow their kids to ride with a DUI driver.
- The media highlight this little-known risk to children, so that parents, policy makers, and enforcement agencies are made more aware of the severity of the risk to children of impaired driving.
- Civil courts ensure that children are not put at risk by DUI parents through court-mandated visitation rights, and driving with children while impaired be clearly stated as a consideration in custody or visitation decisions.
- Criminal courts address the issue of impaired driving with children along when sentencing DUI drivers.

- Parents educate children about how they can protect themselves from impaired drivers, including how to refuse to get into a car with an impaired adult. Parents can teach their children to buckle up and be good role models by wearing their own safety belts so they are less likely to be injured if they are involved in a DUI crash.

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