

What is an unusable child safety seat?

Overview

National child passenger safety experts have always advocated destroying old or damaged child safety seats (car seats and booster seats) to avoid their use by another child. These unsafe child safety seats may not provide the best protection during a crash.

What is an unusable child safety seat?

If any of these problems describes a safety seat you have, it's time to recycle it.

AGE: Most child safety seats have the expiration date stamped into the plastic shell of the seat. If you can't find it, look for the date of manufacture, which is on a paper label stuck to the plastic shell. Contact the manufacturer to find out the expiration date (usually 6-10 years). The condition of the plastic of the seat may change over time, becoming more brittle and less able to withstand crash forces.

USE IN A CRASH: Child safety seats should not be used after they have been involved in a car crash. California law prohibits selling a child safety seat that has been involved in a crash and requires car insurers to replace them. During a crash, significant forces are placed on the plastic shell and harnesses of the child safety seat. These forces may cause stress fractures, or weaknesses in the plastic, often unseen. During a second crash, the plastic shell may fail completely at these weakened areas, causing additional injury or even death. Since no one can predict the risk in a future crash, it is critical for lifesaving equipment to be ready to offer the best protection.

DAMAGE: A child safety seat may have damage, often unrecognized by the user. Use the safety seat instruction manual to check that all parts are in place and working, without cracks or fraying. Don't use the seat if there are any physical signs of damage to the plastic shell or harness. Other removable parts, such as the plastic chest clip or the cloth cover, must be present and in good condition for correct use of the child safety seat. If there is damage to the lower attachment straps (part of the LATCH system), use the vehicle safety belt to install the child safety seat. Replace parts offered by the manufacturer.

RECALLS: Recalls on child safety seats should be taken very seriously. All actions listed in recall notices, such as repairs or replacement parts, should be addressed immediately. In a few cases, the problem may result in severe injury or even death. If a safety seat recall states "Do not use" or "Destroy," follow the advice. Child safety seats that have recalls can be modified or corrected to provide safety for the child. To find out if your child's safety seat has been recalled, visit www.carseat.org and review the information in the section for that manufacturer. The SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recall list includes ALL seats – showing which are NOT on recall as well, so you can be sure the seat name you have is correct. If you are unsure, call SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. for more help.

OUTDATED TECHNOLOGY: Parents and caregivers rely on child safety seat manufacturers to create products that offer the best in safety for their children. Manufacturers conduct research and testing to improve the safety and crash performance of child safety seats. By virtue of advanced technology alone, child safety seats continue to improve their features and performance each year. A child safety seat, manufactured more than ten years ago, was not designed with the technology and engineering advances that became available later on. The "younger" the safety seat, the better the technology.

It is tempting to offer your child's safety seat to another parent, especially if your child only used it for a short time. However, these issues still need to be considered.

Do not share the child safety seat if it:

- Is toward the end of its useful life; check the expiration date (6-10 years).
- Has been involved in a crash or its history is unknown.
- Is missing parts, including the complete instruction booklet, or has damage.
- Has an unfixable recall on the safety seat.

If you can't answer these questions or if you are not sure, no one should use it.

The life of a child is never worth a gamble. A form can be requested from SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. to help decide if a child safety seat should be reused, destroyed, or recycled.

What should I do with an unusable child safety seat?

If you have determined that your child's safety seat should not be used again because of age, crash history, damage, or a recall, destroy the seat or find a recycler to dismantle the seat, separating all the materials (plastic, metal, foam, etc.). The materials may be separated even more into specific types of plastic or metal. The plastic will be crushed and bundled into large bales to be sent to plastic reprocessing plants. The metal will be sent to metal processing plants to be repurposed or recycled.

Why destroy or recycle child safety seats?

First and foremost, safety is the biggest priority. Unusable safety seats must be collected from the community so they are not used again. For years, local child passenger safety groups have collected unusable child safety seats to increase the protection of local children. However, the unusable seats have ended up in local landfills.

Summary

Each year, in Los Angeles County alone, approximately 130,000 babies are born. If each of these children uses a new safety seat, we know that within 10 years, those 130,000 seats will be expired and need to be destroyed. We can do our part to ensure that these unusable safety seats not only get out of circulation but are recycled, too.

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