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HIGHWAY 4 CRASH HIGHLIGHTS DUI RISK TO KIDS

ALTADENA, CA (May 1, 2008) –The troubling case of two small children ejected and seriously injured in an overnight rollover crash in Antioch, northern California, highlights a little-noticed risk to kids – being killed or injured while being driven by a driver under the influence.

The two boys, ages 3 years and 8 months, reportedly were unrestrained in the car when it rolled over in the single-vehicle incident. Both children were ejected, leaving the three-year-old in critical condition with head injuries and the baby seriously hurt. CHP reported that two car seats were found in the car but were not in use at the time of the crash. Three adults, including the children’s mother, did not require hospitalization; the driver, who reportedly was not wearing a safety belt, was critically hurt.

The pattern 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. Many of these kids aren’t placed at risk by a stranger but by the person driving **their** vehicle.”

The trauma caused to kids makes Tombrello angry. “These tiny children had no say about whether or not they got in the car with an impaired driver last night. Too many kids are killed or injured by the actions of people who are supposed to protect them. Not only are these deaths and injuries completely preventable, but most of the crashes are survivable. In most DUI crashes involving a child fatality, the driver survives. Unfortunately, these kids are especially vulnerable because DUI drivers frequently do not take the time to ensure that the kids in their care are

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buckled up – even when, as in this case, a safety seat is available in the car. Without being restrained by a safety belt or car seat, the children’s chances in a crash are substantially reduced.”

Figures from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show that alcohol-related traffic fatalities are at their highest rate for ten years. The majority of children killed in DUI crashes – 68% in recent years – are being driven by the DUI driver.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. is campaigning to reduce the number of children involved in DUI-incidents, recommending that:

- Enhanced penalties be faced by DUI drivers who drive with children in the car.
- Child endangerment charges be brought against parents who allow their kids to be driven by 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 of impaired driving to children.
- Civil courts empower parents to 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 in the car when sentencing DUI drivers.
- Parents educate themselves and their children about how they can protect themselves from impaired drivers.

Tombrello’s message is unequivocal. “Driving while under the influence with a child in the car, or allowing your child to be driven by an impaired driver, is child abuse. We should treat it as such.”