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## FATAL CRASH: A TRAGIC LESSON FOR GRANDPARENTS

ALTADENA, CA (October 22, 2008) — There's no doubt that most grandparents adore their grandchildren, even if they may not keep up with all the latest trends and fashions that preoccupy today's style-conscious parents and kids. But two recent crashes have highlighted the need for grandparents to stay current with the latest information when it comes to safety, especially in the car.

A five-year-old boy riding on his grandmother's lap died on October 15 when she drove through a carport and into a wall close to their home in Antelope, California. The child was apparently killed by the air bag, which would have exploded from the steering wheel at a speed over 100 miles per hour, even if the car was only moving at a very low speed. The grandmother, who was not wearing a safety belt, was critically injured.

Two days later, three Castroville children between the ages of 3 and 7 were hurt, two of them critically, when the SUV driven by their grandmother was hit by another car. None of the children were riding in a safety seat or safety belt as required by law.

Stephanie Tombrello, Executive Director of SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. and herself a grandmother of seven, understands the difficulties faced by grandparents. "Many of today's grandparents raised their kids at a time when car seats were not generally used. Many cars didn't have safety belts in the back, and air bags were not well understood. Many, myself included, were even told that the safest way to bring our newborns home from the hospital was in our arms. It can be hard to grasp that our generation was unknowingly putting our kids at risk.

Today, most parents of young children have learned about the importance of using safety seats from their doctors and other sources, but the previous generation is less aware of the risks of not using them.”

Tombrello has some key recommendations for grandparents when transporting children:

- Choose a safety seat or booster that is right for your grandchild and use it on **every trip**. Most crashes occur close to home, and even low-speed collisions can be deadly. And keep kids in the **back seat**. It’s 40% safer.
- Keep your grandchildren **facing the rear** of the car until they are at least 2 years old (or older, if they weigh less than the car seat’s rear-facing limit). Recent studies show that riding facing rearward is five times safer in a crash than facing forward, so grandparents can help protect other little ones by spreading the word.
- Keep children in a safety seat with a **five-point harness** as long as possible, until at least 40 lbs. There are many current seats available with harnesses certified to 50, 65, 70 or even 80 pounds.
- Once your grandchild has outgrown a seat with a harness, use a booster on every ride until the safety belt fits properly. Take the **5-Step Test** (available at [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)) to find out if the belt fits the child. Most kids need to use a booster until they are 9-10 years old.
- Be aware that over 90% of car seats inspected at community checkups have one or more potentially dangerous errors, so take the time to get informed about the type of seat your grandchild needs and how to use it correctly. The seat should be tightly installed in the car (so that it cannot be pulled sideways or toward the front of the car more than one inch), and the child should be snugly harnessed into the seat.

Tombrello emphasizes the great improvements that have been made in children's safety since she was a young mom. "Car crashes are still the greatest single cause of death and injury to children, but the death rate is only about half what it was 30 years ago for children under age five. Safety seats and safety belts save thousands of lives each year, so make sure your grandchild benefits from them. Grandparents sometimes face a steep learning curve in knowing how to use car seats correctly, but SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. will help. And if parents are struggling to buy the right seat for their child in these hard economic times, then remember—a safety seat makes a great holiday gift for a beloved grandchild."

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