



Customer Focus on Loss Control

Innovative Safety and Health SolutionsSM

Air Bags and Infant Car Seats: Not Always a Safe Combination!

Almost everyone who drives a car knows that seat belts and air bags are extremely effective in reducing serious and fatal injuries resulting from car crashes. Most people also realize that they still need to wear seat belts even when their vehicles are equipped with air bags, since the air bags will inflate *only* in frontal collisions.

Most people who have small children have been told to use infant car seats for their youngsters, starting with the trip home from the hospital. They have also been preached to regarding which types of seats offer their children the most protection; for the very young (infants under 20 pounds), rear-facing seats are safest.

Now comes the dilemma. The combination of rear-facing infant seats and air bags can be deadly when they are used together in the front passenger seat. Unrestrained small children, or an infant in a rear-facing seat placed in an automobile's front seat, can receive fatal injuries when a passenger-side air bag deploys. Parents of infants and young children must heed this warning:

Never place infants or small children in rear facing infant seats in the front passenger seats of vehicles that have passenger air bags!

In vehicles which do not have rear seats which will accommodate an infant seat (in other words, in vehicles in which the seat can *only* be used in a front passenger seat), manufacturers are allowed to install air bag de-activation switches for those times that infants or small children ride in the front seats. Future passenger seat installations may be able to limit the bag inflation speed, depending on the weight of the seat's occupant.

In vehicles which have rear seats, the center position of the rear seat provides the most protection for an infant. The downside of this placement, however, is that the child is not easily accessible to the driving parent if assistance is required. When parental assistance is necessary, the safest means of providing it is to pull off the road, *stop*, and take care of whatever needs attention. Driving while turning around to provide help to an infant in the rear seat is *never* advisable.

