

Safety Checks

Guidelines for Safety Checks focusing on Child Occupant Restraints

These guidelines have been developed to outline the expectations and to clarify roles of those who participate in a Safety Check focusing on child restraints. These guidelines apply only to the Safety Checks and do not apply to;

- “Check Stops” of the Alberta Impaired Driving Program,
- Car Seat Inspection Clinics and
- Think...Think Again Education Sessions.

Purpose

The primary purpose of a Safety Check is to identify drivers who are transporting children in an unsafe manner by identifying major misuses or non-use of child restraint(s). It is an enforcement activity at which offenders will be charged and receive a ticket(s). Safety Checks operate under the direction of the local enforcement agency.

Roles

Enforcement Officers - are responsible for enforcing all aspects of the law. They are in charge of all traffic issues including traffic flow at the site. Ultimately it is the officer’s decision as to whether or not a ticket is issued. Should a ticket be contested in court, it is the officer who will be called to testify and can attest to the expert input of health services workers at the Safety Check.

Health Services Workers (or trained volunteers) - with expertise in the area of child restraints, are responsible for consulting with and providing support to the members in determining major misuses or non-uses of child restraint(s).

Definitions

Child Restraint - A Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (CMVSS) approved device designed for the use of correctly restraining children up to 18 kilograms (40 pounds). This also includes the use of the vehicle safety belt system or approved booster seats after 18 kilograms (40 pounds).

STEP - Selective Traffic Enforcement Program - A traffic enforcement initiative that targets a specific issue, (i.e. occupant restraints or impaired driving programs). STEP campaigns strategically combine education and enforcement activities to increase public compliance to the targeted issue

Safety Check - An enforcement activity designed to enforce the law and provide a brief check of a child restraint for major misuse, a secondary outcome of this activity is to promote education and awareness. For those drivers who have failed to restrain/correctly restrain child occupants under the age of 16, they are provided with the ticket(s) and provided information on the "Option 4".

Think...Think Again Education Session - A class held for drivers who have received the "Option 4" which provides information to drivers/parents on the correct and safe use of their child restraints. Upon completion of the session, tickets are recommended to be withdrawn. These sessions are available to ticketed drivers (Option 4) or non-ticketed drivers as part of public education.

Option 4 - An additional option given to a ticketed driver that allows him/her to attend an education session rather than pay a ticket for mis/non-use of a child restraint. The usual 3 options are to pay the ticket, plead not guilty by mail or plead not guilty in court.

Inspection Clinic - An education activity designed to provide parents/care givers with information and hands-on skill development on how to correctly use a child restraint. This is a community education activity where by parents/care givers voluntarily have their child safety seats inspected by trained volunteers.

Misuse - A child safety seat or vehicle seat belt system not used correctly. This would include not following manufacturer instructions for either the restraint or the vehicle.

Non-Use - A child occupant under the age of 16 not correctly restrained by the vehicle seat belt system or appropriate child restraint system. (i.e. children are traveling unrestrained).

Suggested Equipment and Support Materials For Enforcement Officers and Health Service Workers

- Visible, readable name tags
- Safety vests (so enforcement officers can more readily identify health services staff)
- Clothing for all kinds of weather conditions
- Option 4's - Enforcement officers have these pad with them
- Cheat cards - Enforcement vehicles should have one
- Alberta Transportation "Child Safety Seat" pamphlet (revised February 2002). Also one page rear/forward facing information sheets.
- Seat belt tear off information sheets - RCMP should have these.

Process

1. Enforcement members will inform regional health staff which vehicles have young children or child restraints.
2. Health professionals complete a visual inspection to identify major misuses of the child restraint or the child in a seat belt system. Key questions will be asked regarding the age and weight of the child.

3. Health professional identifies error in use of child restraint and will consult with the enforcement member on the identified errors.
4. Member makes visual check to confirm health worker assessment. If the situation warrants it and the driver is interested, health professionals may provide information/direction to assist in making minor changes, e.g. reposition seat belt system, readjust chest clip, and discuss proper child safety seat installation procedures. Do not make the adjustments yourself but rather have the driver/client do it under the direction of the health professional.
5. Enforcement officer issues ticket if circumstances dictate.
6. Once ticket is given the member discusses:
 - Option 4
 - Discuss the 3 month time frame on the ticket - the first month is to find a session, the second month is to attend a session and the third month provides time for the paperwork to arrive at the courthouse.
7. Should time permit and the driver be open to receiving additional information the Health professionals may discuss details of the Think...Think Again Education Session and other opportunities for a more detailed inspection.
 - Provide written information (Alberta Transportation pamphlet) or the one page rear/forward facing seat diagram with a business card attached.

Reminders

1. In a Safety Check a driver is not voluntarily submitting their vehicle for inspection, they are required to comply to the direction of a peace officer. Under these circumstances a driver or passenger may appear to be upset. If a health professional observes an upset driver or passenger, let the enforcement officer take charge. They are trained to handle this type of situation. A driver who is unhappy to begin with is more likely to file a complaint against you or what you have done.
2. From a liability perspective, it is important to remember that child occupant restraints fall under the Vehicle Equipment Regulation, Part 3 Seat Belts, Traffic Safety Act. (May 2003) As such, these violations are no different than other equipment violations. If minor corrections are required, it may be acceptable to have the driver/care givers make them at the safety check but it is not acceptable to take seat apart and make major adjustments on site. Major corrections are best corrected/discussed at inspection clinics or education sessions, but not at road side. These drivers/care givers should be provided guidance regarding where they can receive information or assistance and it is their responsibility to seek out that information and make the changes. We cannot accept responsibility for other people's behavior.
3. Checklists normally used in an inspection clinic should not be used in a Safety Check due to time constraints at roadside. Inspection Clinic Checklists are designed to be used in

situations where clients have voluntarily come in to have their child restraints checked and have the time to discuss specific concerns for their child restraint.

4. Safety Checks are an excellent opportunity to partner and develop an understanding of what happens in safety checks. It communicates to the public our coordinated effort to reduce motor vehicle injuries and demonstrates a whole community approach to traffic safety. Safety Checks optimize community resources and experts.
5. Have fun and think 'safety' while out on the roads.
6. This safety check process will be reviewed and revised annually.

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