



rear-facing • forward-facing • booster seat • seat belt

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## BOARD POSITION STATEMENT

### CHILDREN LEFT ALONE IN HOT CARS: HYPERTHERMIA

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)\* indicated that incidents of hyperthermia, which usually involved children, accounted for an annual average of 37 fatalities as extrapolated from the National Vital Statistics System Special Mortality File, 2003-2004. This hyperthermia fatality number is close to the annual average of 38 as reported by the Golden Gate Weather Services and Department of Geosciences, San Francisco State University (SFSU), which maintains a national database of publicly reported newspaper articles. This provides a snapshot of preventable deaths due to hyperthermia nationally.

During 1998-2010:

- 494 children died
  - Ages ranged from 5 days to 14 years
  - More than half the deaths were children under the age of 2
- Most of these circumstances were preventable
  - 51% - child “forgotten” by caregiver
  - 30% - child playing in unattended vehicle
  - 17% - child intentionally left in vehicle by adult
  - 1% - circumstances unknown

Within 10 minutes, the inside temperature of a vehicle will be almost 20 degrees hotter than the outside temperature. After 30 minutes, the vehicle’s temperature will be 34 degrees hotter. A dark vehicle dashboard or seat can easily reach temperatures in the range of 180 to over 200 degrees. Heat stroke occurs when a person’s temperature exceeds 104 degrees and their thermoregulatory mechanism is overwhelmed. Children’s thermoregulatory systems are not as efficient as an adult’s, and their body temperatures warm at a rate 3 to 5 times faster than an adult. Therefore, hyperthermia sets in fast, resulting in injuries including brain and organ damage and death.

It is the Board’s position that children should never be left unattended in a vehicle. The back seats should always be checked for occupants when leaving the vehicle. Vehicles and trunks must be kept locked to prevent access by unattended children at play.

For more information, visit:

- AAA: [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com)
- Harrison’s Hope: [www.harrisonshope.org](http://www.harrisonshope.org)
- Kids and Cars: [www.kidsandcars.org](http://www.kidsandcars.org)
- National Safety Council: [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org)
- National Weather Service: [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)

- Safe Kids USA: [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)
- Golden Gate Weather Services: [www.ggweather.com/heat](http://www.ggweather.com/heat)

\*Not-in-Traffic Surveillance (NiTS) 2007

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