

Even for short trips

Child restraints are the law

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER, GILBERTOWN — “When we stop them, they say, ‘I’m just going to the grocery store,’” says Gilberttown Police Chief Tom Abate. “But statistics show that most accidents happen a few miles from home.”

An average of 6 children under the age of 14 are killed and another 694 are injured in motor vehicle crashes in the United States every day. Statistics show that, for those who are killed, an average of 53% are not restrained.

And it can happen a mile from home, while the baby sits in his mother’s lap on a simple trip to the store.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children from 2 to 14 years old, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. In fact, automobile crashes rank third overall in terms of the years of life lost, behind cancer and diseases of the heart.

But according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), many of those young lives could be saved if their parents would simply follow the law when it comes to the use of safety seats.

From 1975 through 2003, an estimated 7,020 lives were saved by the use of child restraints. In 2003 alone, an estimated 446 children under age 5 survived potentially fatal crashes because they were restrained properly.

According to the NHTSA, child safety seats are 71% effective in reducing the number of deaths for infants under the age of 1 year, and 54% effective in reducing deaths for children ages 1 to 4. For infants and toddlers in light trucks, the reduced risks are about 58% and 59%, respectively.

But the use of child safety seats is more than just a decision to be made for the safety of children. It is the law.

For those who do not choose to use them, the fine can be stiffer than the mere cost of a safety seat.

In Alabama, child restraint violators are charged a \$25 fine plus court costs of \$103 — making the total fine for the violation a whopping



Statistics show alarming numbers of children killed because they are not properly restrained

Photo courtesy of Stolenchildhood.com
About 53% of the children killed in auto accidents are not restrained properly

“It’s the law, and we will enforce it.”

-- Gilbertown Police Chief
Tom Abate

\$128.

Both Abate and Butler Police Chief Chuck Breland say that when they see a child riding in a vehicle unrestrained, they will pull them over ... and they will fine them.

On average, Abate and Breland say that they ticket from 3 to 5 persons each month for child restraint violations within their respective jurisdictions, with even more warnings issued for such violations.

According to Breland, his department is seeing an increase in child safety seat and seat belt violations and is taking steps to stop it.

“We launched a campaign last year to try to put a stop to this,” he says. “We were seeing more and more of it, and we’re getting serious about it.”

And, both Abate and Breland add, officers do not have to have another

reason to stop a driver in order to issue a child restraint ticket.

“We can stop them if we see them,” says Abate. “We are serious about this. We know that some people can’t afford to pay a fine. But it’s the law, and we will enforce it.”

The law doesn’t end its requirements when the child reaches school age. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia have booster seat laws for children up to age 6, including Alabama.

Yet, national statistics show that less than one out of every five kids between the ages of 4 and 8 uses in a car booster seat. Over the past two years, less than 20% of kids who should be in booster seats actually sit in them when they are riding in cars.

The fact is, belt-positioning booster seats reduce the risk of injury by 59% for children ages 4

to 7.

For adults, the state’s seat belt laws are also specific and enforced, with a \$25 fine for not complying and one point against the violator’s driver’s license.

“In the past, we couldn’t stop someone just for not wearing a seat belt, but we could ticket them for it if we stopped them for something else,” Abate explains. “But now, we can stop them just for that, and we do.”

Research has shown that lap/shoulder safety belts, when used, reduce the risk of fatal injury to front seat occupants of passenger cars by 45% and the risk of critical injury by 50%. For those who drive light trucks, safety belts have been shown to reduce the risk of fatal injury by an even greater margin — by up to 65%.

According to recent studies by the NHSTA, some parents who DO use child safety seats for their children are simply not installing or using them properly. But the proper installation and use of the seats can be critical for the prevention of injury or death.

According to Chief Breland, one of the issues affecting the use of child safety seats is the fact that some parents are not sure how to use them, or what type to provide for

Remember this ...

Infant restraints, child seats, and booster seats provide excellent protection for children if they are fitted correctly, and they are the law. Here are a few points to remember:

- It is illegal to carry a child in your arms in a vehicle, even if you are traveling a few miles from our home.
- Never put a seatbelt around both yourself and a child on your lap.
- Children must never share a seatbelt. It’s illegal.
- Choose the right child restraint. Always use a child restraint that has been certified to meet the requirements set down by the law.
- In order to determine a suitable restraint for your child, give consideration to your child’s height and weight, as well as their age.
- Always use a child restraint exactly as the manufacturer recommends.
- If using a second-hand restraint, child seat or booster seat, ensure that it is not more than 10 years old, has not been damaged in a crash, all buckles and adjusters work correctly, and the strap-webbing is not frayed.
- Follow all the manufacturer’s instructions carefully. If the instructions have been lost, contact the manufacturer.
- Do not use an infant restraint, child seat, or booster seat in the front passenger seat if there is an airbag fitted for that position.
- The safest location for a child restraint is in the rear seat.

their children at certain ages.

“It’s not the police officers’ job to teach you how to use your car seat,” Breland says. “But there needs to be some education done to show these parents what to do.”

Although manufacturers’ instructions must be consulted in order to properly install safety seats, there are laws that govern where to place the seats according to the age and weight of the children.

Alabama child restraint law mandates that children be placed in rear-facing seats until they reach one year of age or 20 pounds, then in forward facing seats until the age of 5 years or 40 pounds. After that time, the law still requires that they are restrained in booster seats until age 6.

Safety belts are required by Alabama law for anyone riding in the front seat of a vehicle, and in ALL seats for those children less than 15 years old.

As a rule, children in rear-facing child seats should not be placed in the front seat of vehicles equipped with passenger-side air bags. The impact of a deploying air bag

striking a rear-facing child seat could result in injury to the child.

The NHTSA also recommends that children 12 and under sit in the rear seat away from the force of a deploying air bag.

By Alabama law, there are certain vehicles that are exempt from seat belt laws, including those built in 1965 or earlier that are designed for less than 10 passengers, rural mail carrier vehicles, newspaper delivery vehicles, and vehicles that normally operating in reverse.

Both Breland and Abate say that the use of safety seats and seat belts is a must in their jurisdictions. It is a must because it is the law, and, more importantly, for the safety of the children.

The NHSTA agrees, stating that if 100% of motor vehicle occupants under 5 years old were protected by child safety seats, an estimated 550 lives could have been saved each year.

Whether they are traveling across country or just to the grocery store, the law is clear: children must be restrained in the proper safety seat. It could be a matter of life and death.

Love lights will shine at Relay for Life event

BUTLER — Lights of love will brighten the night sky at the Relay For Life of Choctaw, Alabama on Friday, May 11. During a special luminaria ceremony, candles will be lit remembering loved ones and honoring those battling cancer.

“The luminaria ceremony is very special to me because my dad, Horace Allen, died with cancer,” said Vicki Breland, Luminaria Chairperson. “It is during this ceremony that we honor those who have won the battle against

cancer and memorialize those who did not. We call each luminaria a “Beacon of Hope”. Last year, at the 10:00 pm ceremony over 1100 Beacons of Hope lit up the darkness. It was truly an awesome sight. We invite you to purchase a luminaria in honor of or in memory of your loved ones and join us at the Luminaria Ceremony. It is truly something that you will never forget.”

If you would like to purchase a luminaria in honor of or in memory of someone you know, you

may do so by seeing any Relay for Life Team member, purchasing online at www.acsevents.org/relay/al/choctawcounty, or mailing to:

Vicki Breland
214 Harrell Ave
Butler, AL 36904

If mailing, be sure to include the name of the person for whom the luminaria is being purchased, designate whether it is in HONOR of or MEMORY of and include \$5.00 for

each luminary. They may also be purchased the night of the Relay for Life event in Butler. Come by our tent to see us!

The American Cancer Society Relay For Life began in 1985 and remains a celebration of survivorship and remembrance that raises funds for and awareness of the fight against cancer. After sunset, luminaria decorated with the names of those who have battled cancer are lit and left glowing throughout the

night to remind participants of the incredible importance of their contributions.

For more information about Relay For Life or cancer, please contact the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 or www.cancer.org.

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide, community-based, voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives and diminishing suffering from cancer, through research, education, advocacy and service.

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