



Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY

Keeping a close eye out: Susan Auriemma of Manhasset, N.Y., backed into then-3-year-old Kate about two years ago. Since the accident with her daughter, Auriemma has become an activist on the issue of preventing backover injuries and deaths.

How to prevent backover deaths of kids?

Some advocate rear-view cameras; others, education

By Jayne O'donnell And Sharon Silke Carty
USA TODAY

Susan Auriemma was backing her Volvo SUV out of her driveway last year when she heard cries from behind her car. It was her toddler daughter, who was supposed to be in the house.

"I came out of the car, and she was crying, 'Mommy, Mommy, you hit me with your car,'" Auriemma says of her daughter Kate, then 3.

"The guilt was so overwhelming and immediate," she says.

Despite the horror, Auriemma was one of the lucky ones. Kate left the hospital with only scratches and bruises. Since 1994, at least 500 children have died from being backed over, and the safety group Kids and Cars estimates two are killed a week.

Auriemma has joined the ranks of safety advocates who want to reduce backover injuries and deaths. But while that goal is shared by many, there's disagreement about how best to reach it.

Some advocates are pushing for rear-view cameras with video screens in all cars and trucks. But others

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question the effectiveness of cameras and prefer to focus on education.

Legislation pending in Congress would require the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to set a standard for rear visibility that all vehicles must meet. Larger rear-view mirrors, rear sensors that sound a warning beep or cameras are among the options.

Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids and Cars, says the number of backover fatalities is steadily increasing. She estimates that 50 children are backed over every week. In about 70% of cases, the child is backed over by a parent, grandparent or neighbor.

NHTSA must include these non-traffic deaths in its federal fatality database by 2009. "The data we have is just the tip of the iceberg," Fennell says. "People are going to be mortified and amazed when they see how big a problem this is."

Education vs. technology

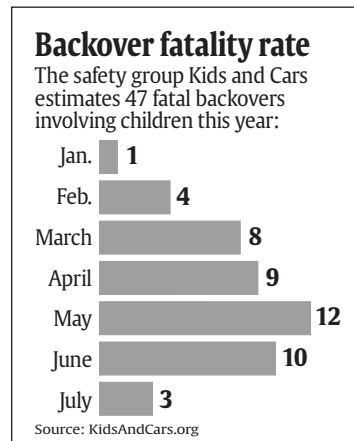
Next month, Safe Kids Worldwide, part of Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., will launch a public education campaign about backovers. The "Spot the Tot" campaign, funded in part by General Motors, urges drivers to look around vehicles for children and pets before pulling out of driveways or parking lots.

Included in the campaign: self-sticking window warnings about backovers.

"What we have to remember is, a camera isn't a silver bullet," says Safe Kids spokeswoman Dawn Deeks. "It's a highly technological way of doing something. (Our campaign) gets people in the mind-set of thinking about children."

Studies of rear cameras conducted by Consumer's Union about three

years ago showed they were "extremely effective" for preventing backovers, says senior product safety counsel Sally Greenberg. Greenberg says education is "not nearly as effective as making design changes. It's much safer to build the danger out of the products. ... Eventually, we'd like to see (cameras) on everything. This is a technology whose time has come."



By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Rear cameras and warning devices such as beepers may help, but whether and how they are used is what's important, others say.

Lorrie Walker, Safe Kids' training manager, says cameras likely would have the same effect as safety belt reminders: "You hear the ding, ding, ding, and then after awhile, it doesn't mean anything to you."

NHTSA expects to complete work on a study of backover technology within a couple of months. Spokesman Rae Tyson says the study will look at how effective the systems are and how they are used by drivers.

Nicole Nason, NHTSA's new administrator, watched agency tests of rear cameras recently. "It's a little disheartening — the technology is not perfect," she says. "They detect some objects very well. They don't seem to detect children that well."

Nason, who has two daughters under age 6, has a camera on her new

Honda Pilot. Still, "I almost ran over my husband," she says.

Virginia Tech Transportation Institute has done two studies for GM in the last three years of drivers using rear-view and warning technologies. They found that systems with sensors and warning beepers and those with cameras had little effect on whether participants struck unexpected obstacles: At least half of drivers still hit them.

Auriemma had checked her surroundings to make sure no neighborhood kids were near the car before she backed out of her driveway on Memorial Day weekend last year. She has since paid \$1,000 to have a rear-view camera installed in her Volvo, but says it's not the only answer.

"I believe cameras could be a crucial part of the solution. But nothing replaces educating children and good, old-fashioned parenting," Auriemma says.

Tips for keeping children safe

- ▶ Walk around and behind a vehicle prior to moving it.
- ▶ Make children move away from your vehicle to a place where they are in full view before moving the car.
- ▶ Teach children that "parked" vehicles might move. Just because they can see the vehicle doesn't mean the driver can see them.
- ▶ Never leave children alone in or around cars. Teach children to never play in, around or behind a vehicle. Keep toys off the driveway.
- ▶ Trim landscaping so sidewalk, street and pedestrians are visible.
- ▶ Keep vehicles locked at all times, even in the garage or driveway.

Source: Kids and Cars

Discussion: Why do backover deaths occur with such frequency? What measures have safety advocates proposed to help reduce backover deaths? In most backover incidents, who is driving? Why isn't the public aware that backover fatalities are such a big problem? How is Safe Kids Worldwide trying to prevent backovers? Why do some safety experts believe that technology is a better way to reduce backovers? What are the problems with rear-view cameras and warning devices?

Activity: Select four eye-opening statements or statistics from the article, and list them below. Next, read each statement to your mom or dad, and jot down her or his reaction to it. Then, ask your parent if she or he has ever been involved in or had a close call with a backover. If the answer is "yes," find out more about the incident. What could have prevented it? In your parent's opinion, what is the best way to reduce backovers? Finally, as a class, consider your parents' input, and develop a catchy phrase that will help adults remember to check (and recheck) behind their cars before backing up. Write the slogan in the bottom box, and cut it out. Encourage your parents to post it on their car's visor or dashboard.

Statements from article

Parent's reactions

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