

Fire Commissioners Column.....

Bill Madison

I had an intimidating experience last month with the installation of a child car seat that I'd like to share with you. My grandkids (2 and 4) were visiting from Virginia so I borrowed a car seat and booster seat so everything would be ready when we met them at the airport. The intimidation came when I tried to install the car seat. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get it pulled tight enough to hold firmly in place and not twist. It seems I had belts, harnesses and clips everywhere yet nothing seemed to be correct. Believe me installing a car seat isn't for the faint of heart!

Washington State Law lists three stages of car/booster seat arrangements for our children:

- Age 1 & younger REAR FACING INFANT SEAT
- Age 1 to 4 (20-40 LBS.) FORWARD FACING CHILD CAR SEAT
- Age 4 to 8 (40-80 LBS.) BOOSTER SEAT

According to Washington's Child Restraint Law, children need to be in a booster seat until they are 4 feet, 9 inches tall. Vehicles with lap belts only are exempt from the booster seat requirement. Children under age 13 must ride in the back seat, whenever possible. Fines are more than \$100 for each unbuckled or improperly buckled child.

Did you know that car seats are only designed to withstand one major crash? If a car seat is involved in a significant crash, you should replace it. That's why it's never a good idea to purchase an old car seat at a garage sale. You don't know its' history. If you've noticed, the Goodwill stores don't sell them anymore because of this. Also, I never knew that car seats have an expiration date. The expiration date is printed on the car seat and it's good for 6 years from original manufacture. That's a good indication how quickly the technology and requirements for child car seats change.

Summing up:

- Children should remain rear facing, in the back seat, until they are 20 lbs. and /or 1 year old.
- The base of a properly installed car seat should be able to move side to side less than 1 inch.
- The plastic clip holding the car seat straps (retainer clip) should be at the armpit of the child.
- Children should use a booster seat until they are 8 years old or taller than 4'9".

Here's the good news. If all this seems too much for you, there is help available. The fire department has several state qualified technicians who will be happy to help you insure your car/booster seats are adequate and are installed properly. Just call us at 262-9660 and set up an appointment to have your car looked at. It will take about 30-45 minutes. We'll arrange a time for you to bring your child with you to the fire station and we'll go through the correct installation and use of your car seat. That's a pretty good deal, and it's FREE.

Don't be intimidated by your car seat. Set up an appointment today!

Thanks to volunteer Cindy Grey from station 4 for supplying me with this valuable information.