

Child Passenger Safety Restraints in School Buses

Update on Regulations and Training

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Recent changes in recommendations and regulations have affected the use of child restraint systems (CRS) in school buses. A major challenge is training parents, bus drivers, and assistants to install the systems correctly. Making a CRS compatible with the school bus seat may require special solutions, such as changing the webbing length of the school bus seat belt so that the buckle does not interfere with the CRS installation.

To help school transportation providers and educators deal with these problems, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has developed an 8-hour workshop, Child Passenger Safety Training for School Bus, based on the Standardized Child Passenger Safety Training program. A certified child passenger safety instructor or technician must teach the course, which is offered in partnership with the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services. NHTSA's website soon will post a list of state contacts.¹

NHTSA has issued several regulations and recommendations that affect the use of CRSs on school buses. For example, the Lower Anchors and Tethers

¹ www.nhtsa.dot.gov



Photo: SafeGuard Bus Seats

Heritage Christian School in Indianapolis, Indiana, installed lap shoulder belts in its fleet of 11 school buses.

for Children (LATCH) system, which connects a car seat to anchors mounted in the vehicle, has been required in two seating positions on all school buses of 10,000 pounds or less (gross vehicle weight rating) since September 2002; the tether connection, however, is not required. The system is optional on larger school buses.

In 2004, NHTSA issued a final rule that allowed safety vests to be attached directly to school bus seat backs. Safety vests use a strap that wraps around the back of the seat, for attaching to the harness system. The new rule warns that the seat immediately behind should be vacant or the occupant restrained by a safety belt or other CRS.

NHTSA also has updated a recommendation on the reuse of CRSs after a vehicle crash. The update, however, does not address school buses directly, and NHTSA is reviewing the recommendation to provide more specific guidance. The revised guideline is scheduled for release this summer.

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Photo: SafeGuard Bus Seats

Sled test of "seat within a seat" design (SafeGuard's SmartFrame) gauges effectiveness of lap-shoulder restraint for buckled students, as well as extent of maintaining protection for unbuckled students.