

Backing Up: 50 Children Crushed Each Week

— Four Habits Can Save Them!

By Professor Frederik R. Mottola,
National Institute for Driver Behavior

For Greg Gulbransen and his wife, Leslie, life as they knew it ended one evening several years ago.

After feeling a bump under the wheel, his headlights lit up a scene in his driveway that would change their lives forever. Their precious 2-year-old son, Cameron, lay sprawled, clutching a blanket and bleeding heavily from his head.

Jennifer McLogan of CBS2 news reported the Gulbransen's tragedy and their dedication to reducing the likelihood of such hardships from happening to other families. After years of effort, the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act was passed by Congress in 2010, which called for a backup camera in all cars by 2014. However, as of September 2013, the Department of Transportation has continued to postpone implementing the mandate to auto manufacturers.

With fifty children each week being treated in the United States emergency rooms as a result of being crushed under the wheels of a family member's vehicle, and until all vehicles are equipped with backup cameras, drivers need to examine the techniques they use when backing.

The blind area to the rear of most cars and SUVs is dependent upon the configuration of the rear window and the height of the driver. The lower in the seat the driver is, the greater the blind area directly to the rear of the vehicle. There are very few drivers who have less than a 50-foot blind area, and many have an even greater blind area. To conceptualize how large an area that is, picture this: the average blind area would contain fifty adults laying on the ground shoulder-to-shoulder to the rear of the vehicle and the driver would not see a single one. And, imagine how many toddlers could wander into that space.

The old method taught in driver education (and required on most states' licensing exams) for turning the head rearward and looking over the right shoulder should be discontinued. Looking out the rear window does not give the driver any more information than is gained by looking into the rearview mirror. And, looking over the right shoulder makes the driver's side of the vehicle totally blind to the driver. When preparing to back into an area where vehicles and bicyclists may travel, such as crossing a sidewalk, backing into a street (to be avoided when possible) and backing out of parking spaces, turning the head to search out both the left and right side windows is a necessary supplement to using the mirrors.

Drivers should be taught how to effectively adjust the outside mirrors and how to use them, as well as how to acquire habits for using the rearview mirror. *A proper adjustment of the outside mirrors should give the driver a view of the side of the vehicle*, which will allow the driver to detect a child approaching the vehicle. Do not tilt the mirror adjustment outward preventing a view of the side of the vehicle as is recommended by some. And, if add-on convex mirrors are placed in the lower outside corner of each mirror, the viewing angle will be greatly increased. Speed must be at a slow walking pace. By continuous use of all three mirrors (or, the outside mirrors and a backup camera), and with a slow movement, the driver will be able to see anyone wandering into the vehicle's backing path.

Even when a vehicle has a backup camera, drivers must develop these four habits to help avoid the tragedy that the Gulbransen's, as well as hundreds of other families each year, have experienced.

1. Check to the front and rear of the vehicle before entering it.
2. Back at a slow walking pace.
3. Check the outside mirrors and the inside mirror (or, backup camera) continuously, in this sequence, with no more than one-second pauses: rear, passenger side, rear, driver side, rear, passenger side, rear, driver side, etc, until the vehicle is stopped. When the vehicle is equipped with a backup camera, substitute the views of the rearview mirror with views of the backup monitor along with the use of the outside mirrors.
4. If you feel any resistance to the rolling of the vehicle, STOP MOVING! Secure the vehicle, and check to see what is impeding your movement. Stopping may make the difference between broken bones or fatal internal injuries to a toddler.

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