

“Family Safety in the Car” Program

Description and Purpose

Family Safety in the Car is a one-time, two-hour class for violators of the safety seat and safety belt laws. Violators are referred to the class by participating courts. The purpose of the program is to save lives and prevent injuries by motivating drivers to buckle up their families and educating them to use restraints properly.

Recognition Received

Letters of support have been received from California Highway Patrol, California Office of Traffic Safety, Los Angeles Police Department, and National Easter Seal Society. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. was selected by Nationwide Insurance as one of three national winners to receive the 1996 On Your Side Highway Safety Award for developing Family Safety in the Car, which was recognized as an “exemplary and innovative program.” A study on effectiveness of the program conducted by University of California, Irvine, was reported in the July 2004 issue of *Pediatrics*. Violators who participated in the program showed greater knowledge, were more likely to have an appropriate restraint for their children, and made fewer usage errors than violators who did not participate. Researchers stated that correct use improved most on items corrected during the hands-on inspection component and recommended that referrals be made administratively instead of requiring a court appearance.

Program History

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.—the non-profit organization founded in 1980 and recognized nationally for expertise in the field of child passenger safety—developed the program. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. provides the curriculum, selects providers, and specifies procedures for the program. Currently, courts in Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, and Yolo Counties are referring violators to the program.

Downey Municipal Court piloted the program in July, 1991. More than 50,000 violators of the child restraint law and safety belt law have attended the two-hour class; approximately 25,000 car seats have been checked. Of those seats, 20% were safe and legal to use without correction; 60% were safe and legal to use only after instructors provided replacement parts or made necessary adjustments. The other 20% of the seats were rejected because they did not meet federal safety standards; parents were required to obtain an appropriate seat for the child and bring it back to the program to be checked.

How the Program Works

- ◆ SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. provides consultation to the court and the county health department, if desired, to help them meet the requirements of the child restraint law.
- ◆ SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. collaborates with a local Family Safety in the Car program provider to set up classes within the jurisdiction. Classes are taught by nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians and Instructors.
- ◆ Violators of Vehicle Code Sections 27360, 27360.5, and 15620 (unattended child in vehicle) are referred by the court to the program. SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. provides the court with a handout for violators, in English and Spanish, that has a telephone number for information and registration.
- ◆ Violators attend a two-hour class, which includes lecture, discussion, and videos.
- ◆ Parents cited for child restraint violations must bring a car seat to class and have it checked. For violators who do not have a car seat or bring a seat to class that does not pass inspection, a list of low-cost programs in the county is provided.
- ◆ Violators pay a fee at the class to get a completion certificate, which they return to the court.
- ◆ Community members may attend the class and have their safety seats inspected without charge.

*For information on Family Safety in the Car education program for violators, please contact:
Cheryl Kim, Program Coordinator (626) 968-6555.*

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