

NHTSA Ease of Use Program

Child Seat Misuse

More children are killed or seriously injured in automobile crashes than any other type of incident. NHTSA research on the effectiveness of child car seats shows that **when properly installed and used**, they reduce fatal injury by 71 percent for infants (less than 1 year old) and by 54 percent for toddlers (1 to 4 years old) in passenger cars.

According to a May 2003 report from NHTSA, nearly 73% of installed child car seats displayed one or more critical misuses, defined as forms of misuse that could reasonably be expected to raise the risk of injury to a child in the event of a crash. The most common critical misuses were loose harness straps securing the child to the child car seat, and loose vehicle seat belt attachment around the car seat. More than half of child car seat users make one of these two mistakes.

NHTSA child car seat misuse statistics reflect the critical nature of making child car seats easy to use and practical for parents on the go. Innovatively designed component systems are critical to reduce misuse and improve seat effectiveness.

As the world's largest manufacturer of safety components and advanced restraint systems for child seats, SafeGuard works with child car seat manufacturers to develop products that make car seats easy to use correctly. SafeGuard strives to develop and market quality products that ultimately improve the safety of every child riding in a vehicle.

NHTSA EOU Program

The NHTSA Ease of Use (EOU) program was originally established on November 2, 2002. The primary goals of the EOU program were to provide valuable information to the public as well as encourage manufacturers to make improvements in child car seat designs. The original program rated seats in five areas, assigning an A, B or C rating to categories including assembly, labels, instructions, securing the child, and vehicle installation. NHTSA indicates that at the outset of the program, 57% of child car seats received an A rating, versus 81% of 2007 car seats receiving an A rating.

This increase in A ratings in the five years after the original launch of the EOU program indicates that the program has been effective in improving car seat designs. However, since the EOU program began, new technologies have become available for use in child car seats. The wide availability of LATCH in passenger automobiles, the concerns about misuse of LATCH, and a lack of general awareness in consumers about LATCH are primary issues that drove NHTSA to update ease of use ratings. Other NHTSA concerns related to clarity of instructions, as well as ongoing problems with loose harnesses and loose vehicle installation.

The update of the EOU program was officially announced on January 30, 2008. NHTSA aims to continue to advance the original goals of the program: to provide valuable information to the public as well as encourage manufacturers to improve child car seat design. The program was altered to award star ratings rather than grade ratings, based on features tested by NHTSA, including the following (taken from [the NHTSA parent information brochure](#)):

- How simple is it to secure your child in the seat?
- Does the car seat have features that make it less complicated to install in the car?
- Are the instructions understandable and easy to find?
- Are the labels clear and simple to understand on the packaging and on the seat itself?

NHTSA emphasizes that all car seats rated are certified to meet Federal Safety Standards and strict crash performance requirements and that this system only rates how easy certain features are to use. The organization also emphasizes that the best car seat is one that fits your child properly, fits in your vehicle correctly and is used every time your child rides in a vehicle.