



THE DANGER OF UNATTENDED CHILDREN IN VEHICLES

City of SeaTac, Wash. June 3, 2013 – Each spring and summer you read the articles in the newspaper or hear it on the evening news: a child has died after being left alone in a vehicle due to hyperthermia (elevated body temperature). Some of the children are left in the vehicle intentionally so an adult can run a “quick” errand and some are left accidentally after the driver exits the vehicle, forgetting to remove the child.

According to San Francisco State University, 49 children died of hyperthermia in this country after being left in a vehicle in 2010. In the last 10 years, more than half of those children that died were under two years of age and almost 95% were under five years of age.

People shake their heads and cannot understand how a person can leave a child in a car on a warm day. It is easier than you think and with warmer weather coming into the Puget Sound area it is a subject that anyone with a child in their care should be aware of.

Myth: There only is a danger to kids on very hot days.

Truth: On a 72 degree day (common in this area) the internal temperature in a vehicle can rise 35-40 degrees in approximately one hour when the windows are rolled up due to solar radiation.

Myth: “Cracking” the window slightly will keep children cool.

Truth: Studies have shown that leaving windows slightly open has little effect on the temperature inside a vehicle since solar radiation is primarily heating the objects in the vehicle, not the air.

Myth: Children can handle extremes in temperature.

Truth: Young children do not have the internal temperature regulating mechanism that adults have. Also, children dehydrate more quickly than adults.

Myth: It is legal to leave a child unattended in a parked vehicle for a short period of time in Washington State.

Truth: RCW 46.61.685 and RCW 9.91.060 strictly prohibit leaving children unattended in vehicles.

What can people do to help avoid this tragedy? Here are some tips:

1. Any time you leave your vehicle, take all children with you. It will slow you down, it will create more work, it may save a child's life and it *is* the law.
2. If you need a reminder about children in the back seat, place your briefcase or purse next to the child. Another "trick" is to leave the diaper bag on the front seat as a reminder. These types of reminders are especially important if you do not regularly carry children in your vehicle.
3. Get into the habit of "look before you leave". As you exit your vehicle scan the interior to look for children or other things that need your attention.
4. Place electronic "reminders" to yourself on your PDA, smart phone, or email calendar to check on your child.
5. If your spouse or other adult is carrying a child and does not normally do so, call them to ensure that the child has been removed from the vehicle.
6. Ensure that daycares and schools notify you promptly if your child does not show up as scheduled.
7. If you are concerned about a child you see alone in a vehicle, call 9-1-1.

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About the City of SeaTac:

Incorporated in February 1990, the City of SeaTac is located approximately midway between the cities of Seattle and Tacoma. The City of SeaTac is 10 square miles in area and has a population of 27,110. The City of SeaTac is a vibrant community, economically strong, environmentally sensitive, and people-oriented. The City boundaries surround the [Seattle-Tacoma International Airport](#), (approximately 3 square miles in area) which is owned and operated by the [Port of Seattle](#). For more information contact Jeff Robinson, economic development manager, at (206) 973-4812.

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