

Fatality underscores importance of car seats

By Kathryn Reed

Not even a grandma's embrace is strong enough to save a child when the vehicle she is traveling in is involved in an accident.

Motor vehicle crashes are the No. 1 cause of death for ages 1-12. Two children in the United States die each day as a passenger in a vehicle, and 325 are injured. Those numbers could be cut in half if child seats were used, and used properly. These facts are from the U.S. Department of Transportation, based on 2010 figures, the latest available.

It's possible 3-year-old Caroline Maxfield of Colorado would be alive today had she been in a car seat. She died July 30 in a vehicle accident near Cave Rock.



This is one of three vehicles involved in an accident in July where a toddler died. Photo/Provided

Three other children were asleep in the back of the Suburban that was involved in that three-vehicle collision. They survived.

The toddler was on the lap of her grandma with a seatbelt going across both of them. Not really being strapped in, this scenario is more like putting a child in a slingshot, according to officials.

“Sometimes people overlook safety and it has tragic results. That is what happened here,” Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Science and engineering go into the design of car seats. A minimum safety standard must be adhered to in order for a manufacturer to be able to sell the seats.

But even when people use the seats, about 60 percent of the time they are not installed correctly, according to Guevin.

The July fatality has Tahoe Douglas on a campaign to educate parents about the importance of restraining their children in a vehicle – and doing so properly. Tahoe Douglas Fire is the only agency on the South Shore that does car seat safety inspections.

“Car seats are specially designed to transport the frailest of our passengers,” Guevin said. “The five-point harness ... shoulders, hips and in between legs ... is the same as a racing harness. Pilots use it because of G force. It spreads the crash forces over a wider area.”

Chris Lucas is one of the firefighters certified in car seat safety. He has spoken at Barton Health classes to tell expectant parents all about the seats. More firefighters are going to a training at the end of the month.

Each state has different requirements, with weight and height the main criteria.

The angle of the seat is important to prevent neck injuries. Making sure the seat doesn't move much is also important.

“Statistics show there is still a lot of misuse. And it's

totally avoidable," Guevin said.

To contact Tahoe Douglas about a child car safety seat inspection, call (775) 588.3591.