

Bill Passed in the Senate to Include Safer Power Windows

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By AMBER GILES - *NewsNet Web Reporter - BYU NewsNet*

A national campaign to make power windows safer for younger passengers was rewarded with a passed bill in the Senate that included new regulations for car manufacturers.

Power windows in automobiles have killed or injured thousands of children. Since 1990 at least thirty-seven children have been killed by power-windows, most of them age three or younger.

Jeffrey Runge, M.D., administrator of the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and U.S. Senator, Mike DeWine of Ohio, a strong advocate of child passenger safety measures, unveiled the new regulation Wednesday during a visit to the Columbus Children's Hospital in Ohio.

"This regulation will prevent the tragedy of a child's head or limb being caught in a power window. Although these incidents are infrequent, a simple, inexpensive remedy is available and should be standard practice," Dr. Runge said in a press release.

Thanks to the new bill, safer switches will be mandated in cars, vans, pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles for sale in the U.S. on or after October 1, 2008.

Rocker" (push down) or "toggle" (push forward) power window switches are used in most automobiles made by Detroit-based automakers, which a child can easily activate inadvertently.

"The types of switches that are the safest require an active movement to pull it up. What happens is the other switches you can just lean on them and they'll lower the window," said Dr. Marilyn Bull in a press release.

The new regulations require manufacturers to replace "rocker" and "toggle" switches with safer "pull up/ push down" switches that must be lifted to raise the window. The change of switches costs next to nothing and could save automakers money if a standardized system is implemented.

NHTSA also desires that manufacturers install auto-reverse mechanisms for all power windows. Consumers are willing to pay this additional cost of \$8-10 per window in the price of the car.

According to a national poll conducted by Harris Interactive on July 17, 2003, 75% of respondents and 78% of parents are willing to pay slightly more for cars with safer power windows.

Representative Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat from Illinois, is another advocate for safety regulation.

"If logic prevails-because the cost to implement these safety changes is negligible and the technology is already there-we should be able to move this legislation along," Schakowsky said. "This is a pretty easy fix yet can solve a life-threatening problem."

Sherry Hull, Sandy, UT, whose three-year-old son was nearly choked to death by a power window in July, says she can't understand why automakers don't install safer switches.

"It's a horrible way for anyone to die, and it's preventable," Hull said. "We, as parents, must put the heat on manufacturers to enforce this new legislation. I think many parents are unaware of the dangers inside their own cars."