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Attempt to buy a new car seat these days and the choices are overwhelming — a multitude of brands, colors, sizes, styles — it can make any consumer exhausted just looking at all of them and agonizing over choosing the best one to keep a child safe. Just 25 years ago, a car seat was a fairly unknown device, and child passenger safety a fairly overlooked notion.



On July 1, the state of North Carolina will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the effective date of original Child Passenger Safety Law — which was: "an act to require passenger restraint systems for children under two years of age being transported by the child's parent who is operating his/her own family purpose vehicle."

A celebration of the passing of the original legislature will recognize key players in child passenger safety, including the UNC Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC), the Governor's Highway Safety Program (GHSP), the Department of Insurance, the NC Pediatric Society, and the Child Fatality Task Force — all of which continue to play an important role in the advocacy of child passenger safety, research and evaluation of effective methods of child restraint, or North Carolina state legislation.

The first sponsor of the Child Passenger Safety Law was Rep. George Miller of Durham. To many, this first Child Passenger Law seemed rather weak and lacked the provisions that would truly

promote child passenger safety. But it was the opinion of Rep. Miller and others that the passing of some kind of law, albeit devoid of certain needs, was a step in the right direction for an increased interest in the topic.

The first law went into effect on July 1, 1982, with an expiration date of June 30, 1985. During that time, interest in child passenger safety became more apparent and amendments in accordance with research conducted by HSRC were made to the original law that would increase safety and protection for children while in a motor vehicle. Under the reinstated law, the age of children required to be in a safety restraint increased to age 4. Through continued research and evaluation outcomes and passionate advocacy by proponents of strong child passenger safety laws, the North Carolina law has evolved into what it is today:

Children less than age 16 in front or back seats are covered under the NC Child Passenger Safety law.

A properly used child restraint device (CRD) is required if the child is less than 8 years old AND weighs less than 80 pounds. Most parents and other care givers will be able to comply by using belt-positioning booster seats for children between 40 and 80 pounds. The child must be within the weight range for the child restraint/booster seat and it must meet Federal standards in effect at time of manufacture.

Children may be secured in a properly fitted seat belt at age 8 (regardless of weight) OR at 80 pounds (regardless of age) — whichever comes first. Placing the shoulder belt under a child's (or adult's) arm or behind the back is both dangerous and illegal.

Highway Safety Research Center enters into research exchange agreement with Netherlands organization

Countries throughout the world are recognizing the need to reduce severe injury and fatalities on their roads, and improve highway safety. There are a number of factors that contribute to a severe or fatal injury in a crash — anywhere from seatbelt use to excessive speed. Over 40,000 crash-related fatalities occur on U.S. roads each year — a statistic that is soaring in comparison to many other countries with similar economic and social climates as the U.S.



As the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC) continues efforts to find the most effective methods in reducing the number of crash-related fatalities and injuries, HSRC and the Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Verkeersveiligheid (SWOV), Institute for Road Safety Research, based in Leidschendam, Netherlands, entered an agreement to collaborate on highway safety research, as well as participate in an employee exchange program between the two institutions.

"We are very excited to work in conjunction with SWOV and learn more about the type of research they conduct. Through the employee exchange program, we'll be able to have more of a first-hand account of their research methods, as well as the knowledge and insights of one of their researchers," said David Harkey, director of HSRC.

Through the exchange program, Martine Reurings, Ph.D., began her six-week turn with HSRC in mid-April as a visiting researcher from SWOV. Dr. Reurings was able to experience and work within HSRC through the end of May. Within the next few months, HSRC will begin making preparations to send a representative to the Netherlands.

In addition to general research and the employee exchange, the two Centers will explore opportunities for collaborative projects to improve road safety in developing countries throughout the world.

HSRC and SWOV officially signed the agreement on March 7, 2007. Attendees of the University of North Carolina community signing the agreement included Tony Waldrop, vice chancellor for research and economic development, UNC-Chapel Hill; Peter Coclans, associate provost for international affairs, UNC-Chapel Hill; David Harkey, director, UNC Highway Safety Research Center; and Fred Wegman, managing director, SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research.

HSRC aims to provide support to older drivers and pedestrians

The senior population in North Carolina and nationwide is steadily increasing and on track for numbers to reach all-time highs. The UNC Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC) strives to better understand the factors that contribute to the unique needs of the senior driving and pedestrian population through a variety of research-based projects.



Supported by a grant from the Governor's Highway Safety Program (GHSP), HSRC helped to establish the North Carolina Senior Driver Safety Coalition in the spring of 2004. The Coalition has brought together representatives from key agencies and organizations across the state, including NCDOT, Division of Motor Vehicles, Division of Aging and Adult Services, AARP, AAA Carolinas, NC Medical Society and others.

"The overall goal of the Coalition has been to improve safe mobility for the State's growing elderly population," said Dr. Jane Stutts, Associate Director for Social and Behavioral Research at HSRC and Coalition chair.

In the summer of 2005, the Coalition was asked to take on the added role of facilitating an Older Driver Working Group (ODWG), under the umbrella of the state's Executive Committee for Highway Safety. In this role, the group was charged with recommending specific strategies for improving older driver safety. To date, the

ODWG has presented four strategies to the ECHS, all of which have been approved. Those strategies include:

- Improved signage at non-standard interchange approaches
- Identification and improvement of hazardous intersections
- Improved roadway and driving environments
- Increased public awareness of issues and resources

Two additional strategies are currently being considered by the group: targeting the law enforcement community to educate them about issues affecting older drivers and actions they can take to increase community awareness of these issues, and targeting the medical community to identify and assist medically at-risk drivers regardless of age.

In addition to simply recommending strategies, the ODWG is committed to ensuring that the strategies it recommends to the ECHS are implemented, drawing from the resources that organizational members bring to the Working Group.

In addition to driving issues, HSRC is leading efforts to improve safety for older pedestrians. Funded by the federal National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Walk Wise, Drive Smart is a senior pedestrian safety program coordinated by HSRC in partnership with the community of Hendersonville, NC.

With more than 31 percent of Hendersonville's population being 65 and older, it provides an ideal model community to implement the elements of the Walk Wise, Drive Smart program, which includes:

- Conducting educational workshops and a series of walking audits of Hendersonville neighborhoods
- Gathering extensive community feedback through surveys and interviews
- Identifying elements needed to implement a pedestrian safety plan that is responsive to Hendersonville's needs

Pulling from successful elements in Hendersonville, the program aims to continue to develop and implement a model that can be replicated in similar settings in North Carolina and beyond.

HSRC News Briefs

UNC School of Journalism class partners with UNC Highway Safety Research Center

CHAPEL HILL — A public relations campaigns class within the UNC School of Journalism has partnered with the UNC Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC) to use the Center as a model client for mock public relations campaigns with emphasis on the National Center for Safe Routes to School (NCSRTS).

The class, instructed by Dr. Elizabeth Dougall, began working with the NCSRTS platform at the beginning of the spring 2007 semester. The goal of the class is to apply learned public relations techniques and fundamentals to the development and presentation of a public relations campaign and concepts, experiencing the feel of a real life agency-client situation. The concepts were designed to increase participation of school-aged children, parents, teachers and communities, in the Safe Routes to School program.

A total of four groups presented to representatives of the National Center for Safe Routes to School and the UNC Highway Safety Research Center in late April.

HSRC Web site posts 40 years of research reports

CHAPEL HILL — Beginning in June 2007, the public now has access for the first time to a bibliography of research reports published from 1967-1990, providing for public access to all of the Center's research reports from its earliest publications to its most current.

The HSRC Library provides access to traffic safety research information from the United States and around the world. Library collections reflect the focus of the Center's research and concentrate on human factors, civil engineering, and design of facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, and motor vehicles.

HSRC manages a searchable e-bibliography archive online, which covers research reports from 1990 to the present. With the addition of the 1967-1990 bibliography, the Center will boast nearly 1000 reports, with new additions made regularly.

The printable retrospective bibliography is located in the Research Library section of the HSRC Web site. To access the bibliography, go to http://www.hsrb.unc.edu/research_library/index.cfm

PBIC offers email alerts

CHAPEL HILL, NC — The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) has added an email alerts sign-up feature on its Web site at <http://www.pedbikeinfo.org>

By signing up for the feature, subscribers will receive periodic e-mails from the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, including research updates, news releases, and the Center's electronic newsletter, the PBIC Messenger. To subscribe, please visit www.pedbikeinfo.org/signup

Since its inception in 1999, PBIC's mission has been to improve the quality of life in communities through the increase of safe walking and bicycling as a viable means of transportation and physical activity.

The PBIC is maintained by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center with funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.
