



International technical conference on “Protection of Children in Cars”

22 January 2021

TÜV SÜD conference on child safety in cars

Munich. The “Protection of Children in Cars” Conference is the leading event of its kind, and a meeting-point of the world’s foremost experts in child safety in cars. Organised by TÜV SÜD, the event offers a forum for talks and discussions on the topic of children’s safety in road travel. In its 18th year, the conference went online for the first time. The focus this year was on challenges from new forms of mobility.

One of the issues addressed was the problem of child car seats in hired or shared cars. Although car sharing currently accounts for only a tiny fraction of the market, reports from conference attendees clearly showed that the need to take along large child seats is frequently a major problem for parents. Integrated booster seats or collapsible models designed for easy transport are a good solution, at least for older children. However, there is no such option in sight for coach travel. Marta Anglès Torradeflot from the Spanish independent experts’ organisation Applus IDIADA criticised the industry’s indifference to the problem, which has been notorious for years. She pointed out that standard child seats are too large for use in coaches, but that given the lower distance between seats in coaches compared to cars, in the event of an accident a child’s head would automatically make impact with the seat backrest.

Non-traditional seat positions in autonomous vehicles are a problem

Although people-movers and other fully automated vehicles are still a pipe-dream, experts around the world are already mulling how safety can be guaranteed in “non-traditional seat positions”. This term is used to describe designs such as seats perpendicular to the direction of travel or recumbent seats, as already proposed in some vehicle manufacturers’ interior concepts. As a talk at the conference demonstrated, the restraint systems currently in use would quickly reach their limits.

Many people find it baffling that children are frequently forgotten – or even deliberately left – in cars during hot weather. Statistics show that this behaviour resulted in 36 fatalities last year in the USA alone. Warning system technologies are slated to be introduced in the future and counted in calculating

EuroNCAP ratings. In fact, Italy has already passed regulations imposing mandatory installation of such systems.

Faulty operation still widespread

The problem of misuse has been raised at every single one of TÜV SÜD's child safety conferences. The term covers faulty use of child seats arising from incorrect installation as well as use of seats designed for the wrong age group. While technical solutions such as Isofix and iSize have reduced the number of these problems over the years, the levels are still too high in the opinion of the around 120 experts from two dozen countries at this year's conference. Contributions from the USA showed that dedicated personal instructions on how to fit and use car seats have far better results than videos or lengthy instruction manuals.

International commitment

However, the biggest problem is often simply that no child car seats are available. A report at the conference presented a project from South Africa that is tackling the problem. "Car Seats for All Kids" collects donations of used car seats, checks and refurbishes them thoroughly and gives them to parents. However, serious deficiencies in child safety are not confined to other continents, as a report from a Romanian NGO revealed. Romania has the poorest child car safety record throughout the EU, with the lowest levels of use of child restraint systems and the highest number of child fatalities in road accidents.

The virtual conference was overshadowed by the loss of its founder and long-standing chair, Professor Klaus Langwieder, who had died suddenly only two weeks earlier. The event had long been familiarly known as the "Langwieder Conference", recalled this year's conference chair, Philippe Lesire, in his concluding speech. Philippe Lesire called on the participants to continue their dedication to the theme and to increase their collaboration and cooperation.

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