



Don't Forget

As we hit the middle of the year and temperatures start climbing, we have vacations and cookouts and summer fun on our minds. Along with the summer fun comes the summer heat, and with the summer heat come stories of children and pets being left in hot cars.

I wonder, what are people thinking? Have you ever sat in a sauna at the gym or been in a car with no air conditioning, or even just been outside when it's 90-plus degrees and there is no breeze? As a parent, I confess I have left my kids in the car to run into the gas station or even the grocery store, but they were big enough to open the door on their own if necessary—I'm talking 12 or 13 years old, not two or three.



As summer heats up, parking professionals can help educate about preventing deaths of children left in parked cars.

By Stasha Echols

the Kids

Kids in Cars

Sadly, tragedies with children in cars will happen across our entire nation without discrimination or preference to demographics. Even sadder is that we expect to hear the horror stories of parents leaving their children in cars to go into work or a casino or a liquor store or even to run into the grocery store for diapers and milk. You would think light bulbs would go off in people's heads: "Oh, I should get the baby or open the door for Fido because he has paws and can't open the door himself." You would think if you put the baby in the car, you'd remember to get the baby out. But on a regular basis all summer long, we will hear the stories of those who didn't.

Planning Ahead

Good Samaritans have been praised for coming to the aid of some of these babies, probably saving their lives. We can certainly do our part in the parking industry as we go about our daily routines:

- Be extra aware of your surroundings and who or what may be in a parked vehicle.
- Listen for crying.
- Look for children or pets left unattended or anything that may seem out of place.
- Educate your maintenance, security personnel, attendants, and other employees in the facility about the seriousness of children left in vehicles. Train them to



Parking Fights Hot Car Deaths

IPI launched its Parking Safety Matters initiative last summer to help the industry combat the more than 40 deaths that happen each year when children are left in hot cars. Along with public service ads and a fact sheet, the association offers several tips industry members can pass on to drivers in their communities:

- Never leave your child in a parked car. Not even for a minute.
- Never leave your car without checking the backseat. Put your wallet or phone in back as a reminder.
- Coordinate with daycare providers and nursery schools to call immediately if your child does not show up as scheduled.
- Call 911 if you see a child alone in a car. Every minute counts.
- If your child is missing, check the pool, car, and trunk of car immediately.
- When it's hot outside, the temperature inside a parked car can rise to fatal heatstroke levels within minutes, even if the windows are partially open.

IPI wants parents, daycare providers, and the general public to be aware of the dangers and understand that even loving, attentive parents are capable of forgetting a child in the back seat. This tragedy can happen to anyone. For more information or to download materials, visit parking.org/safety.

look a little closer at cars as they walk the deck or to look for signs, such as windows left partially down.

- Call out with a smile to those entering your lot or garage with a little one in the backseat: “What a beautiful baby. Have a great day!” Offer a gentle reminder.

What would you do if you came across a crying baby locked in a car? Would you call the police, try to break the window, or just say, “It’s none of my business” and walk away? Put together a plan of action with your staff in case a situation does arise so everyone knows what to do and how to react to get a distressed child out of a locked vehicle and call for medical attention.

We also need to remember our own families as the weather heats up. I know we are consumed by work, bills, traffic, and whatever else life throws at us, and I can certainly understand how a change in routine can throw us off-kilter. I can’t imagine going through what these families have gone through. Losing a child is unthinkable to me, but to lose a child because you had too much on your mind? I can’t imagine. Yet, tragically,

it happens. Even to good parents.

There have been days I have driven home on auto-pilot and can’t remember making any turns, yet there I am, safe and sound in my driveway. Other times I have walked into a room just to say out loud, “What did I come in here for?” I know the human brain is a complicated and tricky thing, and sometimes we cannot control all of our thoughts and memories.

That being true, plan for it. When we buckle a child into the car, let’s remember to leave a sweater, coat, lunch, or laptop bag—something—in the backseat so we’re forced to open the back door and look inside. We might also set our phone alarms to ring a few minutes after we’re scheduled to arrive at work to trigger us to check the car.

We all have many things competing for our attention. But as parking professionals, we have a unique opportunity to help parents avoid these tragedies. We can save lives.

Once we put the car in park, let’s not forget the kids. 🅑



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