

## Car Seat Recalls: What Every Parent Needs to Know

September 2015



# Is your **child** riding in a recalled car seat?



Registering your child's car seat is the best way for the manufacturer to alert you of a recall and send you any required repair kit.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

80%



42%



80% of parents surveyed said that the car seat registration card is important, but only 42% returned the card.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

It's easy. Register your car seat today.



-OR-



Register on your car seat manufacturer's website. You'll need the model number and date of manufacture found on a label on your car seat.

Fill out and mail the registration card that came with your car seat. It already includes your car seat's information. No postage required.



## 6 million+

In 2014, more than six million car seats were recalled for a safety defect, yet fewer than half of them were fixed.

If there is a recall, act!



If your car seat has been recalled, make any necessary repairs according to the manufacturer's instructions, so your child can ride as safely as possible.

## RESOURCES



### Handy tip:

Take a photo of your car seat label and save on your phone so you can have it for future reference.

**Register your car seat:** on your car seat manufacturer's website or [www.safercar.gov/parents](http://www.safercar.gov/parents)

**Find out if your car seat is recalled:**  
<http://bit.ly/recalledseats>

**Sign up for monthly recall email alerts:**  
[www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)

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## Executive Summary

Car seats are among the most important products parents use to safeguard their children, from baby's first ride through the school years. But do you know if your child is riding in a recalled car seat? How would you find out if your child's car seat is affected by a recall? How much do you know about how car seats are developed, tested and regulated?

In 2014 more than six million car seats were recalled for a safety defect, yet fewer than half received the necessary repair. This number is significantly higher than the average rate for other children's products according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). In comparison, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that 75 percent of recalled motor vehicles are repaired at dealerships.

Safe Kids explored the causes of this recall repair gap and found that, on average, only 42 percent of families complete and return the postage-paid registration card provided with new car seats. When a recall occurs, manufacturers contact consumers directly, and, if needed, send a repair kit. Families who don't register the car seat have to rely on seeing a news story or hearing about the recall through word of mouth or social media channels, and then they must contact the manufacturer to request the repair. Consequently, many recalled car seats go unrepaired, increasing the injury risk for children in a vehicle crash.

Fixes for recalled car seats can be as simple as replacing a free, manufacturer-provided part at home, with a small degree of effort. But families need to find out about the recall in the first place.

With support from General Motors, Safe Kids Worldwide conducted a study to understand how families manage car seat registration and recalls. Through a Harris Poll we surveyed 562 parents of children who use a car seat, and in addition, we collected responses from 44 parents who participated in an online bulletin board discussion. We asked parents about their experience with car seat registration cards and recalls, how they learn about and respond to these recalls, which recall sources they trust most, and what influences their decisions around recalls.

Among the findings:

- Only 42 percent of parents said they filled out and returned the registration card for their most recent car seat purchase.
- Fully 80 percent of parents said that the car seat registration card is important, and 68 percent were aware of the card's purpose for safety. Once they learned that the purpose of the registration card is to notify owners of a recall, 97 percent of parents said registering the car seat is important.
- Three out of four parents said they are likely to register car seats through the current registration system, believing it easy enough and functional. But others cited problems with losing or forgetting the card, and expressed desire for more options in methods of car seat registration.
- Parents most often hear about car seat recalls through the news (71 percent). About 41 percent hear directly from the manufacturer. Roughly one-third hear about them from other parents via social media (36 percent), and from family and friends (31 percent). About 19 percent said they hear about recalls from nonprofits or government agencies.
- When asked how they would react if they learned their car seat had been recalled, one in three parents said they would stop using the defective seat until it was repaired. About 37 percent said they would stop using the seat immediately and purchase another brand or demand a refund to purchase another seat.



This study demonstrates a significant need among parents for accessible, reliable, actionable information on car seat safety testing and regulation, the role of car seat registration cards and the importance of taking action when a car seat is recalled.

The good news is that parents can register their new or existing car seats either online or through the mail, ensuring that they are promptly notified about future recalls through official channels and guided through the repair process.



## Take Action: What Parents Can Do

### Register Your Car Seat

- Option 1:** Register on your car seat manufacturer’s website. You’ll need the model number and date of manufacture found on a label on your car seat.
- Option 2:** Fill out and mail in the registration card that came with your car seat. It already includes your car seat’s information. No postage required.
- Tip:** You can also register your car seat online at [www.safercar.gov/parents](http://www.safercar.gov/parents) and click on “car seats.” If your car seat information is handy, you can register in less than two minutes.

### Find Out if Your Car Seat is Recalled

Visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s website at <http://bit.ly/recalledseats> to check if your car seat has been recalled. You will need the name of the manufacturer, model number and date of manufacture. A label on your car seat will likely have all this information in one place.

### Act

If your car seat has been recalled, act. Contact the manufacturer to learn about the recall. They will tell you what to do until the repair is made. If you registered in advance, you will automatically receive the repair. If you didn’t register, you can request the repair from the manufacturer. Once you receive the repair, make it.

- Tip:** Take a photo of your car seat label and save it to your phone so you can have it for future reference.

### Keep Informed

To stay informed about recalls, sign up for Safe Kids Worldwide’s product recall emails. We cover many children’s products and will keep you updated about recall notices from the major federal agencies – National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

### Spread the Word

Share this information about car seat recalls with your network of parents, friends and family. It is helpful to mention it if you are giving the car seat as a gift.



**Share this tweet:** Is your child riding in a recalled car seat? Register your seat. Act now to protect your kid. #Recall [www.safekids.org/recall-info](http://www.safekids.org/recall-info)



Source: [www.safercar.gov/parents](http://www.safercar.gov/parents)

## What Parents Need To Know

### Car Seats Make a Difference

Car seats save lives. In fact, the use of car seats has dramatically decreased the number of children killed and injured in auto crashes. Improvements over the years have made them safer and more comfortable. Now seats are designed to serve children of all sizes, from their first ride home from the hospital until they are ready to move from the booster seat to the seat belt alone.

Strict government safety standards guide manufacturers as they engineer, design, and crash-test car seats. Every car seat made and sold in the United States must meet the same strict requirements. While car seats may look different, and have different price points, they must all meet the same performance standards to be sure they pass difficult crash tests. Before the seat goes to market, significant investments of time and resources are spent to assure the safety features perform as required.

Because the heads of young children are disproportionately large compared to their bodies, and their pelvic bones and spines are not fully developed, car seats are carefully designed to protect our most vulnerable riders. When installed and used correctly, they restrain the child at the shoulder and the hips, both strong parts of the body that can best absorb the forces from a crash. Car seats protect the head and neck, limit the distance a child's body travels forward in a sudden stop and include a buckle at the crotch to prevent sliding feet-first from the seat.

### How Car Seats are Tested

Car seats are rigorously tested using crash dummies that have been engineered to simulate real children in crashes. You can see a brief crash test demonstration at <http://bit.ly/crashtestdemo>. Of course, no parent would allow their child to be used in simulating a severe car crash. So, while crash dummies are not perfect, they help manufacturers find ways to increase safety protection for kids in crashes.

Car seats are tested at 30 miles per hour to see how well the seat would protect a child in a crash. While 30 mph may sound slow, be assured it is not. In fact, that speed is above the threshold of most crashes. Equipped with sensors to measure how the human body reacts in a crash, dummies have been developed to simulate passengers of all ages – from babies, toddlers, school-age children to adults. In crash testing, engineers study the possible impact of injuries on the head, neck, chest and legs.

Once the manufacturer determines the car seat meets federal standards and the seats become available on the market, investigators at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) randomly test the seats to confirm the standards are being met. If there is any question, NHTSA opens an investigation and the product is carefully evaluated.

## How a Car Seat Recall Works

Even under the best conditions and after rigorous testing, a part on a car seat sometimes fails once the product has gone to market. A recent example of a large-scale car seat recall is for a buckle that becomes difficult to open over time. Recalls can vary in the degree of risk posed to the children who use the product. Not all recalls are for safety problems. There could be a recall for incorrect information on a label. In a case like that, parents would simply receive a new label to cover the original and instructions to continue using the seat.

In some cases, consumers or retailers identify a problem with a car seat that is in use and report it to either the manufacturer or NHTSA. A manufacturer may also identify a problem. An investigation is initiated to determine whether there is an actual defect. If a defect is found, and before the recall is announced to the public, the manufacturer is required to develop a “fix” and a plan to notify consumers. Depending on the nature of the defect, a seat that has a recall may still be crashworthy and usable until a repair has been made. The manufacturer will state what to do until the repair is made.

Consumers who have registered their car seat with the manufacturer are informed of the recall and receive the repair automatically and free of charge. Consumers who did not register their car seat must contact the manufacturer to request the free repair. Many recall repairs can be done by a parent with a small degree of effort.

The federal government takes recalls very seriously, and even a manufacturer who has gone out of business must still provide a repair if a recall is identified later. Manufacturers want to avoid selling a product that has a defect, and most car seat manufacturers in the U.S. have a strong safety record.

## Who Issues a Car Seat Recall?

A car seat recall can be issued by the manufacturer after working with one of two government agencies. Sometimes the government can require the manufacturer to pay a fine if it is felt the recall could have been handled more quickly and in a better way.

When car seats are used in the car, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is responsible for regulating them. When a car seat is used outside the car as a carrier, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) becomes involved and regulates that part of the product. For example, many car seats today, especially seats made for infants, have a handle attached to the carrier and may be used outside the car or in a stroller. If a problem is identified involving parts of the product that are intended to serve a purpose outside the car, but do not affect the performance of the car seat in a crash, this recall is handled by the CPSC.

## The Car Seat Registration Card

Part of the federal safety regulation governing car seats requires manufacturers to provide a way for consumers to learn of a recall immediately and directly from the manufacturer. Every car seat comes with a postage-paid registration card attached to the seat for the consumer to fill out and mail back to the manufacturer.

Unfortunately, fewer than half of car seat consumers return the registration card. Some parents aren't aware of its importance or they believe it will be used for mailing lists or other marketing purposes. In fact, regulations prohibit manufacturers from using the registration cards for anything but a recall. Parents won't receive unwanted product marketing by returning the registration card.

In addition to the card, manufacturers also provide an online registration option.

*“The safety of children in cars is a big priority. NHTSA is committed to helping parents register their car seats and other child products with manufacturers, which we know is an important first step if there is a recall. We’re also working with manufacturers to make sure parents receive a quick and thorough solution during a recall so children are protected.”*

– Dr. Mark Rosekind  
Administrator  
National Highway Traffic  
Safety Administration

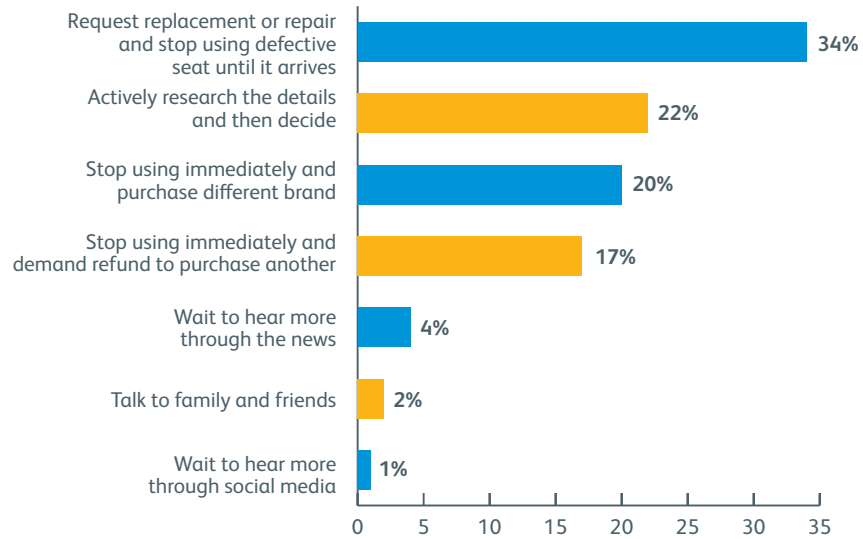


## Parent Perspectives on Car Seat Recalls

### Recalls

We asked parents how they would react if they learned their car seat had been recalled. Many were adamant that they would stop using the product if it was recalled.

Figure 1: Response to a Recall



Parents are concerned about car seat recalls, and many report feeling anxious or distrustful about the recall process.

When presented with actual recall notices, parents drew distinctions between what they perceived to be serious threats to their child's safety (seat detaching from the base or difficulty unlatching the harness buckle) and those that were merely annoyances (an incorrect NHTSA hotline number).

But some parents admitted to being confused by recall notices, feeling stuck in a circle of technical language that is difficult to understand, and feeling unable to gauge the seriousness of the risk involved in a particular recall. They expressed a need for accessible, plain language and information that makes both the threat and the solution clear. They also were concerned about being able to easily and correctly complete a car seat repair on their own.

*“Personally I would want a new seat. I do not believe a parent should be messing with a car seat. I would not feel confident in my work no matter what.”*

Kristina

*“I was thinking how much did the manufacturer think about safety when making the product and how much testing of the product was done before they gave it to the public.”*

– Stephanie

*“I read up on the recall and decide if I think that the recall is valid and could actually cause harm to my child or if it is ‘recalled’ simply because people aren’t using common sense when using the product.”*

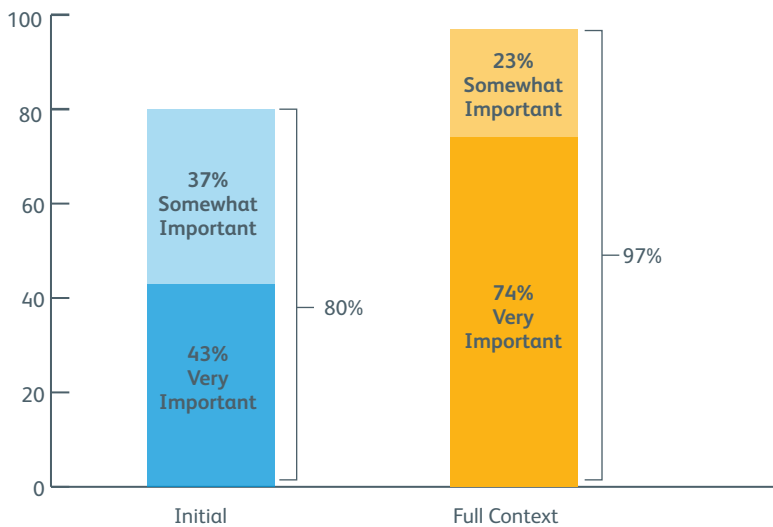
– Brianna



## Registration

Parents were asked how important they thought it was to send back the registration card for their car seat. They were asked this question once at the beginning of the survey and then later after it was revealed that registering was the best way to receive notifications. Unsurprisingly, 80 percent said it was an important thing to do (with 43 percent “very important”) even before being shown the full context. Once the full context was revealed, 97 percent of respondents said it was important (with 74 percent “very important”).

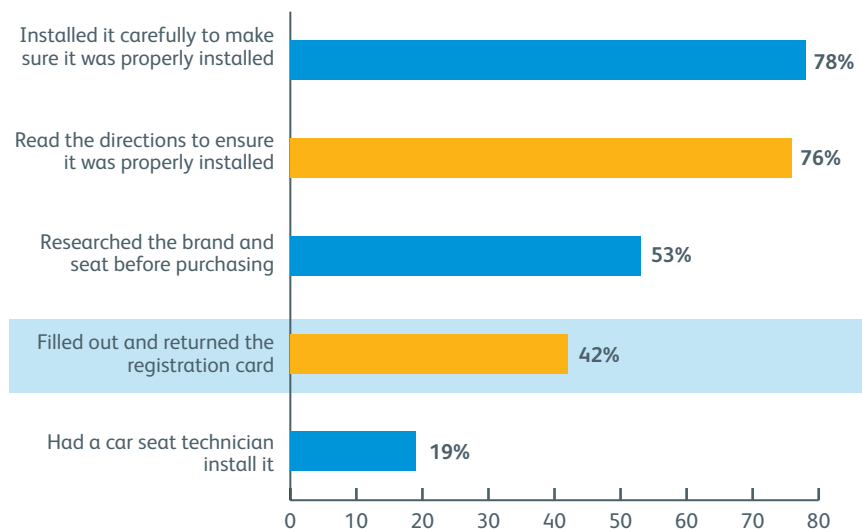
Figure 2: Importance of Returning Registration Cards



When asked what they thought the purpose of the registration card was, 68 percent replied it was for safety. Other parents believed it was for manufacturers’ marketing or consumer statistics.

Most parents reported taking multiple steps to help ensure the proper functioning of car seats, yet completing the registration card ranked low on the priority list. While 78 percent installed their new car seat carefully, 76 percent read the directions to be sure it was properly installed and 53 percent researched the brand and the seat before purchasing, only 42 percent filled out and returned the registration card.

Figure 3: What Parents Do When Purchasing a Car Seat



*“I always leave the card out to do, but most times it gets put in a drawer and not found for months, or I accidentally throw it away.”*

– Chastity

*“It was super easy and only took a minute to fill out the information. I don’t think it can get easier, as you have the card and an Internet submission as available options.”*

– Anna

*“I usually hear about product recalls from other moms in Facebook mom groups, on Facebook, on Instagram, or from the news.”*

– Nicole

*“I would share information any way possible. Through emails, social media, face to face, over the phone, etc. Any way possible!”*

– Jermaine

The vast majority of participants who had registered their car seat said the process was simple and straightforward.

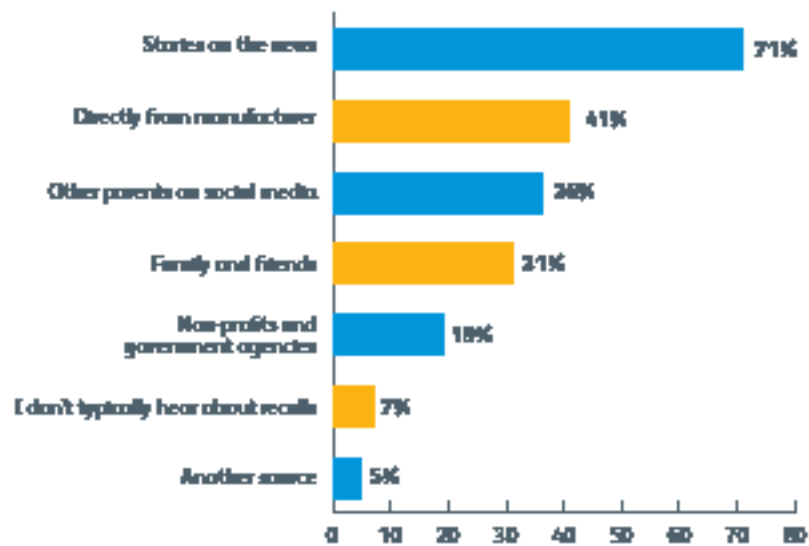
Some study participants admitted to losing or forgetting the car seat registration card.

Parents who tend to register other products in their home were more likely to register car seats. Parents who reported registering products tended to prioritize doing so with two categories of products: those that protect the safety of their children and major purchases of high-priced household items.

### Information Sources

Parents reported that they typically learned about car seat recalls in a variety of ways.

Figure 4: How Parents Learn about Recalls



Participants were extremely likely to say they share information about child safety recalls with other parents, demonstrating how important social networks are to disseminating information.

Our findings demonstrate that there is a need to raise awareness among parents about car seat recalls. We need to educate parents about the importance of registering their car seat and acting on a recall when it happens.

## Methodology

In July 2015, online bulletin board discussions were held with parents of children ages 10 and younger who use a car seat. The bulletin board forum is similar to other qualitative research methods such as focus groups, but allows participants to interact online and over a longer period, at times convenient for them.

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 47, with an average age of 35. Roughly 63 percent were female. The majority of participants (63 percent) were Caucasian, with African American, Hispanic and Asian-American participants, as well. Participants were recruited evenly from the South, West, Midwest, and Northeast regions of the U.S. More than half completed a college degree, and income ranged from less than \$25,000 to more than \$150,000.

Drawing upon qualitative insights gained from the July 2015 bulletin board discussion, a Harris Poll survey was conducted in August 2015 within the United States among 562 parents whose children use car seats. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, household income and number of children in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Study participants responded to questions related to their experience with product recalls, car seat recalls specifically, communications channels for recalls, and perceptions of product registration. Respondents also reacted to sample recall notices and potential changes in registration procedures, as well as weighing in on their trusted sources of child safety information.



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