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New Booster Seat Law for Kids Takes Effect June 1 **Up to 4'9" — Boost Them Every Time**

OLYMPIA, WA – The Washington Traffic Safety Commission is reminding parents and caregivers that changes to the child passenger safety law will kick in June 1 of this year.

Washington's new child passenger safety law will closely follow the best practices recommended by safety experts. All points listed below will be required by law effective June 1.

- Restraints must be installed correctly (according to car seat and vehicle instructions)
- Kids up to their eighth birthday, unless they are four feet, nine inches tall (57 inches), must ride in appropriate child restraints
 - Infants must ride in rear-facing child restraints to at least one year of age and 20 pounds (because car seat instructions require it)
 - Booster seats for kids from age four to their eighth birthday, unless they are four feet, nine inches tall
- When children use the seat belt they must wear it correctly or continue to use a child restraint or booster seat
- Kids ride in the back seat up to age 13 (where practical to do so)
- Cars with all lap belts in the back are exempt from booster seats
- Putting the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back is illegal

The law was passed two years ago, but law makers decided to give people a grace period while state safety experts spread the word about the importance of using booster seats for kids from age four until their eighth birthday.

"Traffic collisions are a leading cause of death and serious injury for children," says Lowell Porter, Traffic Safety Commission Director. "People underestimate the

forces experienced by vehicle occupants during a collision, especially when it comes to small children.”

A booster seat solves a problem that many parents are not aware of: adult seat belts don't fit kids under four feet, nine inches tall. Seat belts are engineered to fit an adult male five feet, 10 inches tall weighing 165 lbs. Because children have small, flat hip bones the seat belt can easily slide up across the abdomen where, in a crash, it can seriously damage internal organs. It happens so often emergency department physicians call it “seat belt syndrome.” A car seat with a harness is recommended for children until about age four or when they outgrow them.

As of April 30, 2007, a booster seat ticket will cost drivers \$112 for every unbuckled (or incorrectly buckled) child in their vehicle. This cost increased from the previous \$101 fine.

The new law, as found in RCW 46.61.687, was passed because the legislature recognized that nationally fewer than five percent of all drivers use child booster seats for children over the age of four years. Also, seventy-one percent of deaths resulting from car accidents could be eliminated if every child under the age of 16 used an appropriate child safety seat, booster seat, or seat belt. In crafting the law Washington legislators followed recommendations of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The intent is to decrease deaths and injuries to children in vehicles.

For additional information about the Washington Traffic Safety Commission, visit www.wtsc.wa.gov

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