
INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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INSTITUTE COUNTERS CLAIMS ABOUT 'THE SAFEST' AND THE 'MOST DANGEROUS' AIRBAGS IN CURRENT VEHICLE MODELS

ARLINGTON, VA — Today Public Citizen and the Center for Auto Safety held a press conference to address "which cars have the safest and which the most dangerous airbags." In response, Institute President Brian O'Neill points out the following:

"The claim that the 'safety' of a passenger airbag can be characterized by its deployment direction, either vertical or horizontal, is a gross oversimplification. It is incorrect. Differences among airbag designs currently in use include not only deployment direction or path but also crash sensor design/location, minimum deployment threshold, bag mounting location/folding pattern/shape, venting pattern, and inflator output. All of these design parameters influence airbag performance, which automakers and airbag suppliers are continuously working to optimize. Claiming that deployment direction alone makes the difference between a 'safe' and a 'dangerous' airbag betrays a lack of knowledge about the sophistication of airbag design engineering in today's vehicles.

"For example, Public Citizen and the Center for Auto Safety claim the Volvo 850 airbag deploys horizontally. But Institute testing clearly shows the passenger airbag deployment path is upward and along the windshield, very similar to the path in the Honda Accord. The first documented child death occurred in April 1993 in a 1993 model Volvo 850 in which an unbelted 6 year-old had moved forward and was on top of the dashboard when the airbag began to deploy. The airbag propelled this child upward, and she sustained fatal head injuries when she struck the rear view mirror.

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“Any child on top of or very close to an airbag when it first begins to deploy is at risk of a serious injury or even death, regardless of the bag’s deployment direction. The important message for parents is not that some airbag designs may be better than others but that properly restraining infants and children in back seats is the way to eliminate the risk of airbag inflation injury. Parents should not be misled into thinking that some airbag designs make it okay to let infants and young children ride up front.”

Broadcast-quality videotape is available from the Institute.

A consumer brochure tells how to protect children in cars equipped with airbags: PO Box 1420, Arlington, VA 22210.

Related information on Internet: <http://www.hwysafety.org>.