

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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DRIVERS ARE AWARE OF AIRBAG RISKS FOR CHILDREN AND SMALL ADULTS AND SAY THEY WOULD STILL BUY VEHICLES WITH AIRBAGS

ARLINGTON, VA – Many vehicle owners are aware of airbag-related problems, but a large majority believe airbags are effective and wouldn't want to have them deactivated, a new Institute survey indicates.

To gauge awareness of issues and attitudes about airbags, the Institute surveyed by telephone 900 drivers of vehicles with either driver and passenger airbags (549) or driver-only airbag (351). Responses were gathered August 1 and 2 in three states – Michigan, North Carolina, and Texas – from a random sample of owners of 1994-97 airbag-equipped vehicles. The sample was derived from state vehicle registration data maintained by R.L. Polk.

Seventy-nine percent of all respondents said they would want at least a driver airbag in their next car. Sixty-six percent said they would want dual airbags. When asked if they felt safer or more at risk in vehicles with airbags, 81 percent of drivers said they feel safer. Eighty-six percent said adult passengers also are safer. Responses were different when drivers were asked about child passengers. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said they think children are more at risk in vehicles with airbags.

Drivers shorter than 5 feet 4 inches are more likely than taller drivers to feel at risk of airbag injuries, the survey indicates. Thirty-two percent of these drivers said they feel at risk of serious injury from a deploying airbag, compared with 13 percent of drivers taller than 5 feet 4 inches.

Fewer than one-third of all respondents (30 percent) said they are concerned enough about airbags to consider having them either permanently or temporarily deactivated or are undecided about deactivation. However, when respondents considered the esti-

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mated costs of deactivation and were informed about airbag effectiveness, only 12 percent still wanted to deactivate driver airbags and just 16 percent wanted to deactivate passenger airbags. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is considering a rule to allow consumers to have their airbags deactivated without special permission.

When Kids Sit in Front, It's Often Because They Want To Be There

Drivers who transport children in vehicles with passenger airbags were asked where children usually sit in their vehicles. More than half (56 percent) said kids always ride in the back. Drivers who transport kids in the front say they do so mainly because children want to sit there. Forty-four percent of these drivers said the children sit in front because they prefer it, and 12 percent say kids sit in front because the drivers want them there. Few respondents attributed their reasons for transporting kids in front to such things as lacking room in the back (6 percent), carpooling (4 percent), separating the children (2 percent), or constant monitoring of an infant (2 percent).

"Vehicle owners are hearing the message about airbag benefits and risks," says Susan A. Ferguson, Institute vice president. "Aware of potential airbag injury risks to children and smaller adults, surveyed owners still want airbags in their vehicles, and they know to sit children in back where they will be safer," she says. "It's interesting to note that when parents allow their children to sit in front it's usually not because the children must sit there. This finding indicates that very few people need to deactivate their airbags if the federal government allows it. Drivers – especially those of short stature – can reduce their airbag injury risk by using safety belts and sitting at least 10 inches away from the steering wheel. Passengers should use belts, too."

Broadcast-quality videotape is available from the Institute.

A consumer brochure spells out how to protect children in cars with airbags: P.O. Box 1420, Arlington, VA 22210.

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

AIRBAG SURVEY RESULTS

	<u>Driver Airbag*</u>	<u>Passenger Airbag*</u>
Percentage of respondents concerned enough about airbags to consider on/off switch or disconnection	30	29
Percentage of respondents willing to pay \$150-200 for on/off switch	9	16
Additional percentage willing to pay for on/off switch if price were \$50-100	4	5
Percentage of respondents willing to pay about \$50 to have airbag disconnected	9	10
Percentage of respondents who said yes to at least one of the above airbag deactivation options (on/off switch or disconnect)	16	23
Percentage of respondents who still want on/off switch or airbag disconnection after being informed of airbag effectiveness and how injury risk can be reduced	12	16
<p>*Responses in "driver" column reflect all 900 surveyed; in "passenger" column reflect 549 who drive dual airbag vehicles</p>		
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Percentage of respondents:		
Who want dual airbags in next vehicle	66	
Who want driver airbag only in next vehicle	13	
Who are aware of problems with airbags	74	
Who think safety enhanced/risk increased with airbags:		
Driver safer	81	
Adult passenger safer	86	
Child passenger at greater risk	68	