Transportation Department To Make Rearview Cameras Mandatory

Ken Thomas, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rearview cameras could become more common in future cars and trucks under new rules the government was proposing Friday to address concerns about drivers unintentionally backing over children.

The Transportation Department was offering new requirements to improve rear visibility in cars by the 2014 model year. Most carmakers would meet the requirements by installing rear-mounted video cameras and in-vehicle displays.

Targeting so-called blind zones in large sport utility vehicles and pickups, Congress required the safety upgrades in 2008 in response to dozens of cases of children getting backed over by cars. The legislation was named after Cameron Gulbransen, a 2-year-old New York boy who was killed when his father accidentally backed over him in his driveway.

"There is no more tragic accident than for a parent or caregiver to back out of a garage or driveway and kill or injure an undetected child playing behind the vehicle," said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. He said the changes would "help drivers see into those blind zones directly behind vehicles to make sure it is safe to back up."

Nearly 300 people are killed and 18,000 injured each year because of backovers, according to data kept by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Nearly half the deaths involve children under age 5 and the crashes also affect the elderly.

Many of the deaths involve busy parents juggling careers and children and toddlers who get behind a parked car, not realizing the inherent dangers. In about 70 percent of the cases, a family member is responsible for the death, said Janette Fennell, president of Kids and Cars, a Kansas-based safety group.

"You're talking about people who love their children more than anyone," Fennell said. "How do you go on if you've killed your own child or grandchild?"

Automakers have been adding video cameras and object detection sensors to vehicles to help drivers when backing up or parking. But the backup cameras are still optional equipment on most vehicles and only about 20 percent of 2010 vehicles have the cameras onboard.

The proposal is expected to be completed next year after a public comment period. Under the plan, 10 percent of the vehicle fleet will need to meet the standards by the 2012 model year, followed by 40 percent in 2013 and all new vehicles by 2014.

The rules will apply to all passenger cars, SUVs, pickup trucks, minivans and other vehicles weighing up to 10,000 pounds.

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