

Alberta Occupant Restraint Program

Car Seats In Motor Homes

Using Infant, Child and Booster Seats in Motor Homes Information Bulletin

Summer in Alberta usually means a family vacation and whether it's a weekend camping trip, renting a motor home for the extended trip across Canada, whether you have an "A" class, "B" class or "C" class motor home, one of the basic questions all parents have to resolve is: How do we install the car seats?

This question usually begins a cycle of phoning an enforcement agency and/or health unit, followed by a call to a government department who will inform you to contact the vehicle manufacturer and/or Transport Canada, who will inform you that motor homes are not required to have tether anchor

locations and that you should contact your local enforcement agency to see what the legislation for your province has to say on the issue. This cycle is usually followed by a visit to the Web, where information from various sources ranges from; "don't take your children in motor homes because they are dangerous" to "don't worry about it, the risk of a crash in a motor home is low" The problem is that somewhere in-between, parents have to gather reliable information and make a decision on how to best protect their children while traveling in a motor home. The following are some points for consideration.



First: Deal with legislation

Point 1: In Alberta, the legislation/law sets the minimum standard with which everyone must comply. Although there is no specific legislation that points out the use of child safety seats in motor homes/coaches or RV's, these vehicles are not exempt from having to use child safety seats. So, children traveling in motor homes are required to use safety seats if they are under the age of six and not exceeding 18 kg (40 lbs). For children above 18 kg,

(40 lbs), seat belts must be used if the recommended booster seat is not available.

Point 2: In Canada, child safety seats and booster seats have to be used in designated seating positions which have "real" seat belts, as opposed to just a restraining belt. A designated seating position will have an approved seat belt which means that the seat belts have been designed to withstand the forces involved in a frontal collision and meet all safety

standards. Designated seating positions are usually forward facing (but can be rear facing) but they are never side facing.

Point 3: In Canada, all forward facing child safety seats must use the tether strap to be effective in a crash.

Point 4: Could you get a ticket? You are more likely to get a ticket for an unrestrained child as this clearly puts them at greater risk for injury in a crash. Could you get a ticket for a safety seat installed in a

side facing seat and not tethered? It is possible but if you are making every attempt to do the best with what you have, that should be taken into consideration.

Second: Acknowledge that it might not be as easy as it seems

Point 1: Unfortunately at this time, there isn't a common acceptable practice or standard that is agreed on when it comes to child safety seats and their use in motor homes. Although all groups want to protect children, we have

- a) provincial legislation indicating that we must have children buckled up properly in motor homes,
- b) national safety standards that do not require motor homes to accommodate child

safety seats,

- c) motor home manufacturers who do not make it possible to correctly install safety seats and
- d) parents who require an immediate solution to their unique problem.

Point 2: Although the long term solution is to have parents pursuing the issue at the national level, where standards are set, the reality is that parents need answers today. Parents must make

choices with the information and resources on hand. Unfortunately factors such as the vehicle environment, our financial situation, or other factors may limit our options in and around safety seats, there are also occasions when we determine that the environment is so limiting in terms of safety options that we choose not to participate in that environment.



Third: Deal with your situation

Point 1: All children (all passengers) should be using the available restraint devices while the motor home is moving. An unrestrained child is at risk of serious injury should there be a sudden stop or crash. The injury data is clear that unrestrained occupants are injured more often and have higher injury severity than restrained occupants. Buckle the kids up every time and for every ride.

Point 2: Not all seating positions in a motor home, RV or motor coach are actually "designated seating position". Although it may look like a

lap seat belt, it may not actually meet the crash standards for a seat belt. (Seat belts are exclusively designed to spread the force of a collision onto specific parts of the boney skeleton (the two hips and upper shoulders). What looks like a lap belt may only be designed to hold things in place. You must check the owners' manual to determine what positions are "designated seating positions". Often only the driver and front passenger seats are designated positions with lap and shoulder belts. Seating positions on the couch,

around the kitchen table or on captain chairs may have belts, but not actual seat belts. Check the manual to determine where the real seat belts are.

Point 3: Tether strap anchor locations in motor homes are not the norm. Manufacturer's are not required to build them into these vehicles and generally do not. Anchor locations would generally be included with a designated seating position and may be built into the seat. Check the owner's manual to see if the manufacturer has addressed the tether strap issue. If no anchor loca-

tion exists, consider securing the tether strap to a component of the vehicle that is part of the metal frame of the vehicle. Do not secure the tether strap to a part of the interior framing (cupboards, floorboards). Make every effort to use the tether strap.

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Additional points for consideration when making a decision on where and how to use child safety seats in a motor home.

Remember

- In Alberta, RV's, Motor homes and Coaches are not exempt from having to use child safety seats and booster seats.
- Wherever possible, use the child safety seat in a forward facing position, where there is a lap belt
- Make sure that what you think is a seat belt lap belt is anchored to the vehicle.
- Make sure that the top tether strap is used and anchored to metal, not to wood.
- It's not easy to use child safety seats in RV's, Motor homes and Coaches, but it's better than having the children totally unrestrained.

- Ensure all passengers use the available restraints.
- Never carry more passengers than there are available restraining devices.
- The total number of seatbelts will vary according the vehicle and according to floor plan.
- "A" class, "B" class and "C" class motor homes have different designated seating positions.
- Child safety seats must be used where applicable and every attempt should be made to use them correctly.
- The installation and use of these seats should follow the recommendation of the child seat manufacturer.
- If there are no designated seating positions, contact the manufacturer and Transport Canada asking for their recommendation and take the opportunity to ask that they look into the issue of safety seat use in motor homes. If no other options exist, use the restraining devices that are available.
- If you are planning to rent an RV, check before signing the contract to ensure that your specific model accommodates safety seats. Many rental RV's specifically indicate that "This vehicle is not able to fit a baby, child or booster seat".
- The use of a booster seat is recommended in a motor home equipped with lap and shoulder belts. If the motor home only has lap belts, the child can be restrained with the lap belt alone, without the booster seat.
- Ultimately if you are uncomfortable with the level of safety seat protection your motor home provides you can choose another vehicle or motor home.

Every Situation is Unique

Every situation is unique. Not every motor home will accommodate safety seats, or provide the same level of protection as we have in our daily vehicles. Some motor homes do accommodate safety seats and some motor homes provide better protection than our daily vehicles. Motor homes are non-traditional vehicles, usually requiring non-traditional approaches to optimizing the

protection for our children. Assess your situation, what you have for a motor home, what designated seating positions are available, how many child safety seats you need to accommodate, and which ones have to be tethered. Then start working on getting them installed into the motor home. Great family vacations always start with simple and obvious reminders; avoid

getting into a collision by staying focused on the task at hand, **Driving**. Don't be distracted by what's going on behind you in the motor home. Make frequent stops and pull over at road side stops to do your sight-seeing. Relax — it's a vacation, not a race to the next camp ground, and make sure that everyone is buckled up.

For more information visit;
www.saferoads.com
www.albertaseatbelts.ca