



Traffic Safety Facts Banner

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OPERATION OF INSPECTION STATIONS FOR CHILD RESTRAINT USE

Child safety may be compromised if a child restraint is not installed correctly into a motor vehicle, if the child is not buckled into the restraint correctly, and if the safety seat used is not age and size appropriate for the child. Studies show that at least 80 percent or more of child restraints are not used correctly.

To help reduce misuse of safety seats, highway safety organizations, public safety agencies, medical facilities, safety associations, auto dealerships, and other groups across the country offer safety seat check-up inspection or fitting stations. At these stations, technicians offer hands-on training about the proper use and installation of child restraints, and advise parents and caregivers as to what is age and size appropriate for their child passengers. There were more than 3,500 inspection stations as of November 2002, most initiated within the last five years.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) sponsored a study to identify and describe the characteristics of model child safety seat inspection stations. The resulting report is organized to assist safety professionals make better strategic and resource allocation decisions for implementation of these stations.

Selected Study Sites

Seven geographically diverse child passenger safety inspection station programs with a cross section of types of sponsors were selected as study sites. The sponsoring agencies included a law enforcement agency in Illinois, a fire department in Georgia, an automobile dealership in Nevada, a community organization in Minnesota, a retail child specialty store in Nevada, and a medical facility in Utah. The seventh study site was a program that administered a network of inspection stations on behalf of a State Highway Safety Office (Indiana).

Site Characteristics and Challenges

Despite the diversity of sponsoring organizations, the inspection station programs shared many similarities in operation, administration, and funding. All of the individual study sites offered child safety seat inspections to the general public, and several also conducted special outreach activities for specific groups. Most sites conducted inspections free of charge, and offered replacement seats free of charge based on their respective seat replacement policies. Some requested donations for replacement seats. All conducted inspections on a schedule of fixed days and hours of operation. Many required appointments, but accommodated walk-ins as well. Adequate parking, public access, safe inspection areas, adequate queuing areas, and weather protection were all factors affecting station location.

Most of the individual study sites used AAA Certified CPS Technicians to conduct actual inspections at permanent sites. Some sites used volunteers to assist in providing inspection station services. Three sites used volunteers who were Certified CPS Technicians to conduct inspections at mobile or monthly inspection stations. Other stations enlisted volunteers primarily as recorders, traffic controllers, and in other non-inspector capacities.

Common administrative challenges identified by study sites included devising workable schedules, coping with weather conditions, storing replacement seats, tracking training and certification of inspectors and technicians, developing referral sources, and meeting language challenges associated with outreach to Hispanic families. Other challenges included obtaining support from agency administrators and addressing liability concerns.

Most of the individual study sites received some funding from their State Highway Safety Office (SHSO), typically for replacement seats. Two programs were fully funded by their SHSO. Two programs had substantial community or corporate funding. All sites relied substantially on in-kind funding for staff salaries.

Circumstances that could terminate a program were loss of funding, concerns about liability, a change in administrative support from the sponsoring agency, or the departure of the program's key person or champion.

Establishing New Inspection Stations

Those considering initiating an inspection station will find the section of recommendations gathered from the staff at the study sites useful.

Recommendations include:

- Determine the need for the service
- Evaluate financial, personnel, equipment, and other resources available from both the sponsoring agency and from the community
- Secure the firm commitment of agency administrators
- Identify short term and long term funding options
- Allow adequate training and start-up time
- Seek funding from community groups.

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *Operation of Inspection Stations for Child Restraint Use* (43 pages plus extensive appendices) prepared by Project Planners, Inc., write to the Office of Research and Technology, NHTSA, NTI-130, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590 or send a fax to (202) 366-7096. Alan Block was the contract manager for this project.

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