

**B-H-K Child Development Board
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Serving Children & Families
through:
Head Start/Preschool,
Early Start,
Child Care,
Even Start,
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Other Family Services

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Ford Motor Company gives 1,100 booster seats to Copper Country
Officials say seats generally underused; could have reduced local child's injuries**

HOUGHTON – The Ford Motor Company today made its first installment on a \$25,000 gift to the Copper Country that's intended to save lives and prevent injuries to young children.

Bob Kreipke, corporate historian for the automaker, delivered 100 vehicle booster seats to B-H-K Child Development Board. The seats are the first part of an overall shipment of 1,100 booster seats that Ford has pledged to B-H-K to ensure child safety.

Valued at \$22.99 each, the Evenflo Right Fit seats are designed for children who weigh between 40 and 80 pounds – usually children age 4 to 8 – and who are too big for regular child safety seats but too small to be restrained properly by regular seat belts.

“We know statistically speaking that about 500 children every year between the ages of 4 and 8 are killed in car crashes, and we know that most of those were not properly restrained,” said Maria

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Sheler-Edwards, safety communications manager at Ford.

“Seat belts are designed for adults, and parents are just not aware that there is a different stage (of child safety devices) after infant and toddler car seats, so what we wanted to do with this program is generate awareness out there,” she said.

The effects of not using booster seats or not installing them correctly can be devastating. Since automobile seats and seat belts are designed for adults, seat belts generally ride across a young child’s stomach and neck instead of the hips and chest, which can contribute to severe internal or spinal cord injuries in a crash.

This spring, a local family learned first-hand about the dangers seat belts alone can cause for young children. John and Joyce Colombe, of Chassell, were involved in a two-vehicle crash in early March, 2001, along Boundary Road in south Portage Township. (See related stories from *The Daily Mining Gazette*.) One person died and six others were injured in the crash, including the Colombe’s 3-year-old granddaughter, Brianna Britz.

Although restrained in a seat belt, Britz sustained serious internal injuries including a ruptured spleen as a result of the crash. The Colombe family doctor later said a properly installed child restraint system could have significantly reduced Britz’s injuries. Britz has since recovered and is currently enrolled in a B-H-K Child Development Board preschool program.

According to a study commissioned by Ford, most American parents are aware of booster seats but only about 21 percent use them. Another problem is that many of the booster seats that are in use are installed improperly or are unfit for service, said Mary Van Orsdel, a certified booster seat technician who works for B-H-K.

“Last July we had a clinic at Wal-Mart where we checked 109 seats, and only 11 came in installed

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correctly,” Van Orsdel said, adding that seats are often not buckled securely. “90 percent of parents put the seats in the wrong way.”

The local seat distribution is part of a national booster-seat campaign involving Ford and 29 other leading national partners. The \$30 million campaign, called *Boost America!*, has three components:

- Education for preschool and elementary school children;
- Grant assistance to existing child passenger safety programs;
- A giveaway of 1 million seats – including 500,000 through the United Way and 500,000 through Ford dealers and partners.

As part of the seat give-away, 35,000 will be distributed in the state of Michigan, Sheler-Edwards said. Of those, 1,751 will be distributed in the Upper Peninsula. In addition to the 1,100 given to B-H-K, Marquette County will receive 389, Chippewa County will receive 300 and the Tri-Center United Way in the southern U.P. will get 42.

Locally, parents may obtain seats by attending a booster-seat clinic, which will be scheduled and announced early in 2002. Clinics will take place at B-H-K’s 18 childcare centers throughout Baraga, Houghton and Keweenaw counties.

Van Orsdel and other certified technicians will install the seats and instruct parents on proper usage. If parents already own a booster seat, technicians will evaluate it for safety by checking the seat visually, checking its crash history and checking to see if its model type has ever been recalled.

Michigan State Police at the Calumet and L’Anse posts also are involved in child safety seat and booster seat programs. Trooper Priscilla Panessidi is a certified technician and is also involved in local booster-seat clinics.

For more information, call 482-3663.