

Tips On Protecting Yourself From Big SUVs And Trucks

(NAPSA)—With over 50 percent of new vehicles sold in the United States turning out to be sport utility trucks, pickups and minivans, owners of traditional two- and four-door passenger cars are now alarmingly at risk for fatal or serious head injuries in a side-impact crash.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), 51 percent of all driver deaths in vehicle-to-vehicle crashes occurred in side impacts (in recent-model cars during 2000 to 2001). This is up from only 31 percent during 1980 to 1981. In 2000 to 2001, almost 60 percent of the driver deaths in cars struck on the driver side were due to collisions by an SUV or pickup.

Government's Crash Ratings Misleading

The government has not updated its side-impact crash rating system to even measure head injuries. A vehicle that offers virtually no head protection in a side impact crash can still receive a "5 Star" in the government test. Its vehicle ratings can therefore be misleading to consumers who desire a safe vehicle in case of side impact protection.

What Can Consumers Do To Protect Themselves?

If you still prefer a passenger car, there are actions you can take to protect yourself and your family. According to the IIHS, side "head" airbags are as important in a side-impact crash as seatbelts



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are in a frontal crash. Side "head" airbags are different from traditional side airbags that were originally introduced to protect only the chest in a side-impact crash. The most common form of side "head" airbag is called a Side Curtain Airbag. The bag deploys downward from above the doors to provide a 4" - 6" wide cushion for the head. This cushion provides significant protection for the head from an intruding vehicle.

For a large number of vehicle models, Side Curtain Airbags are optional equipment. For a specific model, dealers will often have 10 percent to 15 percent of the vehicles equipped with Side Curtain Airbags to cater to consumers who are educated about the product's benefits and willing to pay the \$350 to \$600 additional cost for the vehicle.

To address the alarming increase in fatalities and serious brain injuries, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers (AAM), which represents nine of the world's largest automobile manufacturers, announced in December 2003 that it would enhance side-impact protection for its vehicles. By the fall of 2007, the AAM stated that at least 50 percent of vehicles produced would meet new head protection requirements and that by the fall of 2009, 100 percent of vehicles would meet these requirements.

If a consumer desires side head protection before 2009, it's a matter of finding a vehicle that offers optional Side Curtain Airbags and then finding a dealer that has one of these properly equipped vehicles on its lot.

