

CPSC – F – 06 – 0088

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Brand X Car Seat Consumer Recall Focus Groups

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REPORT VERSION FINAL

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I. INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

the polling company™, inc. is pleased to present to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) this report of findings from two focus groups conducted in Washington, D.C. on December 4, 2007.

The objective of this research was to gain a better understanding of how consumers have responded to recall notices in the past and what would propel them to take action in the future. Specifically, the discussion emphasized knowledge, experience and reaction to the recall of a particular type of Brand X car seat.

To qualify for the group, each prospective participant was interviewed to ensure that he or she satisfied all criteria designed by **the polling company™, inc.** and approved by CPSC staff prior to commencement of the project. The participants represented a mix of ages, race/ethnicities, incomes, education levels, and marital/familial and employment statuses. Each resided in the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area.

All participants were the owners of a Brand X car seat and, according to the list provided by the car seat manufacturer, had received written notice of the car seat recall.

Shelley West, Project Director of **the polling company™, inc.** directed both sessions and was assisted in planning and execution by Kellyanne Conway, President & CEO and Danielle King, Operations Manager.

II. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

A total of 17 people residing in and around the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area (including Maryland and Virginia) took part in these discussions. Relevant information about each participant follows:

GROUP 1: 5pm-7pm

Female 1, 40

- Married
- 2 children at home
- Caucasian
- Works full time
- HHI \$100K+
- Post graduate degree

Female 2, 47

- Single
- 1 child at home
- African-American
- Works full time
- HHI \$60-80K
- Post graduate degree

Female 3, 30

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Caucasian
- Works part time
- HHI \$100K+
- Post graduate degree

Male 1, 39

- Married
- 2 children at home
- Caucasian
- Works full time
- HHI \$100K+
- Post graduate degree

Male 2, 34

- Married
- 1 child at home
- African-American
- Works at home full time
- HHI \$80-100K
- College graduate

Female 4, 32

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Hispanic
- Works full time
- HHI \$100K+
- Post graduate degree

Female 5, 45

- Married
- 2 children at home
- Caucasian
- Stays at home full time
- HHI \$100K+
- College graduate

Female 6, 37

- Married
- 3 children at home
- Hispanic
- Stays at home full time
- HHI \$80-100K
- College graduate

GROUP 2: 7pm-9pm

Female 7, 33

- Married
- 2 children at home
- Caucasian
- Works part time
- HHI \$100K+
- Post graduate degree

Female 8, 30

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Caucasian
- Works full time
- HHI \$100K+
- Post graduate degree

Male 3, 32

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Caucasian
- Stays home full time
- HHI \$100K+
- Some college

Female 9, 37

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Caucasian
- Works part time
- HHI \$100K+
- Some college

Female 10, 37

- Single
- 1 child at home
- African-American
- Works full time
- HHI \$60-80K
- College graduate

Female 11, 37

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Caucasian
- Stays home full time
- HHI \$60-80K
- College graduate

Female 12, 30

- Married
- 2 children at home
- Caucasian
- Stays at home full time
- HHI \$80-100K
- Post graduate degree

Female 13, 33

- Married
- 1 child at home
- African-American
- Works full time
- HHI \$80-100K
- College graduate

Male 4, 35

- Married
- 1 child at home
- Caucasian
- Works full time
- HHI \$80-100K
- College graduate

III. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Parents Use the Internet to Keep in Touch with Each Other and Up to Date on World Events.

To begin the focus group, participants were asked a few questions on their general information gathering habits. From their responses it was clear that attention to the news for these parents of young children varied from self-described “obsessive” to “infrequent.” Most made an effort to know what is going on in the world, but few had the time or energy to regularly read a newspaper front to back or sit down for a planned hour of television news.

For them, consumption of news is as background music or in quick sound-bites screaming from newspaper headlines or crawling across the bottom of a TV screen. Most admitted they followed particular stories of interest when they could and often used the web to both keep up-to-date and probe further into something that attracted their interest.

“I’m addicted to the news. I need to keep up with what’s going on. Things involving children and all the craziness in the world are of particular concern. I read online mostly, CNN or MSNBC.” – Female 6

“I get the majority of my news online, especially since online gives you faster access.” – Male 2

“I go online to read because I sit in front of the computer all day long. But, I still like to have something tangibly.” - Male 1

“I TiVo the news. I can watch it when I want then.” – Female 3

“I kind of just run into [the news]. If it’s important enough it will get to me sometime.”- Female 11

“I read the front page of the Post online every day and then I watch the evening news every night.” – Female 8

“I watch the 10 o’clock news, read the headlines when they pop up.” - Male 3

When asked which stories and issues of the day they were most aware of, discussants in both groups instantly volunteered the recent toy recalls as top-of-mind. Their heightened attention to this subject was a combination of its prominence in the news and their special interest as parents of young children.

“Since my child was born, I’ve been following the recalls.” – Female 8

“You really cannot get away from [the news about the recalls].” – Female 10

“As soon as one recall happens another one is announced.” – Female 11

Internet an Even More Critical Resource When Surfing for Product Info.

The World Wide Web was an essential source for the happenings of the day, and these parents were in even stronger agreement regarding its prominence as a *consumer* resource. When queried on where they would go for information and reviews when seeking to buy something new, nearly every participant said they logged on for everything from product ratings to reviews by other “regular people” who had purchased the product previously.

One woman related a story of being persuaded out of buying a coffeemaker she really wanted because of negative customer reviews. Online word-of-mouth seemed a very popular option, as several women in the group revealed they were a part of listservs and chat groups for moms where they shared everything from tips on how to get a child to take medicine to what stroller to buy to what toys had recently been recalled.

Magazines such as *Consumer Reports* or *Parents* were also popular, but even those were accessed in their virtual format rather than picking a copy off the newsstand. Others liked a more personal touch, citing a preference for speaking with knowledgeable sales people at specialty retail stores.

“I would go to a specialty store, to be honest with you. I would do research online, but I like going to touch and see everything together to compare. Shopping for a home is the exact same thing—you do some research online, but then you have to see the home.”

– Female 5

“I use DC Urban Moms, it’s a listserv. I would use it to write something like ‘I have kids this age, what do you recommend?’” – Female 4

“I find that people on listservs are becoming a little more honest about things, not just talking about all the bad things.” – Male 1

“I read the personal reviews on Amazon.com—those sway me more. People who’ve actually used it are of more use to me.” – Female 11

“I go to the Consumer Reports website.” – Female 12

“I’m part of some Moms’ groups on Yahoo.com. If you say you’re looking for something, you’ll get 15 people who respond.” – Female 7

Concerns About Safety Dominate Parents’ Purchasing Decisions.

When asked what worries were foremost in their minds when shopping for new products, two words led these men and women’s answers: “safety” and “recalls.” No matter what they are buying, they think first as parents and seek to ensure that nothing they may bring into their homes poses any threat to those they love. Quality and simplicity were also attractive features.

“I’m obviously worried about the safety, particularly if it’s about my kids.” – Female 7

“I like things that don’t have a lot of parts, things that are easy to watch.” – Female 8

“I like things that I don’t have to put together.” – Male 3

Product Recalls Come in Several Shades of Gray.

Even before the topic of recalls was mentioned by the moderator or any specific questions asked or definitions thereto read, group participants, particularly those in the 5pm discussion, raised the topic on their own. Many admitted the recent media coverage of the toy recalls has heightened their level of concern and left them a bit overwhelmed. Additionally, some frustration seemed to stem from the very word “recall” and the lack of distinction according to how severe or pressing a particular recall really was. Some felt it was too difficult to pay attention to and understand every single product announcement and hard to sift through the ones that demanded immediate action versus those that were low priority.

“When a product is recalled, a retailer doesn’t necessarily pull it off the shelves. So, you could have a product at home and not even know it, despite all the research you put into it.” – Male 2

*“There is no differentiation of the scale. If something is recalled, it’s because there’s a one in a gazillion chances that it forces a recall versus something like the lead, that is extremely prevalent. Those are put out with the same amount of information. **So, in my mind, the word ‘recall’ is being overused. So, something that is not necessarily life-threatening is being labeled with the same type of attention as something that is harmful.**” – Male 1*

“When it comes to recall, my experience is that the e-mail is cumbersome. There are so many things to do—let me see if my toy is one of them. I think the news attention is a little off kilter, because it’s focusing on a few things.” – Female 3

“It often seems that when the news picks up on a recall it’s because something is dangerous, such as the toys recently. Personally, when I hear of a recall, I think ‘This is something very dangerous.’” – Male 4

Both groups spontaneously raised the example of the “Brand Y Seat” – a small foam seat for infants that helps keep them upright when they aren’t strong enough to sit on their own. Some parents had been putting children in the seat and leaving it unattended on high places such as a table or countertop. Since the seat is not secured to the surface on which it is placed, if the child leans hard enough to one side or gets out of the seat, he or she is then potentially in danger of falling to the ground. As such, the manufacturers of the seat recalled it and issued a warning sticker reminding caretakers not to place the seat on a high surface then leave children unsupervised. Many participants considered this ludicrous and called for an exercise of common sense on the part of the parents rather than a formal “recall.”

At this point in both discussions, the moderator read the following “official” definition of recall, provided by the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

“‘Product recall’ is the request that consumers return a product to the maker (manufacturer) for a new one, contact the manufacturer regarding repair of the product, or collect a refund due to the discovery of a potential safety hazard or because the product is defective.”

The Brand Y seat would be an example of the discovery of a potential safety hazard under the CPSC characterization (due to unexpected or improper use by consumers rather than an actual flaw in the product).

The discussion then shifted to the recall of the Brand X car seat – an example of the second type of recall – a defective part.

Manufacturer Recall Notifications Not Fool-Proof.

Participants in the groups were selected from a list provided by the car seat manufacturer as car seat owners who should have received notice of the recall. The majority of moms and dads in the groups knew about the recall, but there were at least one or two in each group who learned about it only in connection with these focus groups.

Also, while most of them first learned about the car seat recall through notification directly from the manufacturer, others claimed to have never received official word.

“I didn’t get the recall. The only way I found out about it was because I went to the car seat check in—they looked at it and it was the week that they were putting it out.”

– Female 1

“I found out about it on the DC Metro Mom listserv. When I called [Brand X], they didn’t have our seat registration.” – Female 6

“I bought the car seat and the next week I went online to register it, I found out as I was registering that it had been recalled. Then, I called the company and said, ‘Did you know you just sold me a recalled product?’” – Female 12

“This is the first time I’ve heard about it.” – Female 13

Another participant’s curiosity was piqued when she was invited to the focus group, which led her to investigate and learn about the recall.

Car Seat Recall Leads to Mixed Emotions – From Anger to Gratitude.

As parents responsible for the safety of their children, these participants all invest considerable time into selecting the best car seat to protect their infants and toddlers. So, when they learned that something was potentially wrong with the item many had bought just weeks or months before, there was understandable upset. **However, while some participants were incensed or annoyed, others were happy that the car seat manufacturer had taken the initiative to alert them and tell them what to do.**

“I was actually really upset when I bought the [car seat] and there was a recall a month earlier. You put your money into what you think is safest and boom, you get a recall. All that research for nothing.” – Female 6

“I was mad because I have four car seats and because I’d done a lot of research. Once I read it I was fine, after I read it I was a little less angry.” – Female 1

“I spent nearly \$300 for this and now it’s being recalled. At this time, I don’t think I’d even had the car seat a month.” – Female 2

“Because I found out as I bought it, I didn’t even stick it in the car until the recall kit came in the mail. We’ve been using it ever since, though. I don’t know what it was like before, but it is really difficult to tighten those straps.” – Female 12

“I was a bit scared, I didn’t want it to break in half.” – Female 10

“I was glad because sometimes, like with cars, you don’t find out that a recall had been issued. It was nice to know they had admitted it.” – Female 7

*“My reaction was actually mixed—they came to me about it and told me how to fix it. I was like, ‘Wow, they notified me and found a way to let me fix it.’ [Even if it had been more serious] I don’t know if I would have been upset because there’s always some level of learning and possibility, but I would have been more upset if there weren’t any notification and if there wasn’t going to be any way to reimburse or get a new one.”
– Male 1*

*“I wasn’t angry, I worked in product development so I know how long this takes. But, my concern was how serious is this and how long ago did you find out about the problem?”
– Male 2*

On the Spectrum of Recalls, The Brand X Car Seat Was Pretty Simple.

Even those who were initially angered by the car seat recall admitted it was not really that big of a deal. While few could exactly explain why the seat had been flagged as having a problem, most understood there was some potential for the restraint straps to come loose which could leave a child unsecured in an accident. An official definition was proffered by the moderator, to which all respondents (who knew about the recall in advance) nodded in agreement:

“The recall had to do with the car seat harness. The harness adjuster housing (i.e., the bezel) can pop out of position which makes it difficult to adjust the harness to fit snugly around the child. In the event of a vehicle crash, a loose harness around the child could increase the risk of injury.”

The moderator then circulated a copy of the recall notice that was sent to car seat owners – a three-page document, half of which was a letter explaining the situation and then one page of instructions with pictures. Rather than returning their seat or ceasing use, Brand X car seat owners had to make a simple repair to the seat’s adjuster with parts provided to them by the manufacturer either with the recall notice or upon their request through a phone call to the customer service hotline.

Most who earlier said they had gotten a notice in the mail recognized the one provided in the discussion as the same as they had received, though there was some dispute about in what order the pages had been or how many there were. Others saw the notice on the company’s website or received it after calling for more information. All said they got the repair kit with the notice.

The instructions were regarded as easy and the repair to the car seat something relatively simple. Both facts were definite pluses in the minds of these Brand X owners, a few of whom admitted they would have been more upset had they found out their child was in imminent danger or if the repair had been difficult or required a professional.

“I think it was simple enough. It looks difficult at first, but once you got the car seat out and turned it over, it was easy to do. I did go to the website and watch the video.”

- Female 1

“I thought it was an easy fix, but I was still angry.” – Female 12

“The only thing was that you had to use force. I wasn’t really having any problems pulling it out. My problem was loosening it. I made the repair myself.” – Female 12

Wording of Recall Notice Has Clear Impact on How Closely It’s Followed.

In the first group, seven of the eight knew of the recall before the group began. Six of them made the repair called for by the car seat manufacturer, which involved inserting a few screws into pre-drilled holes on the underside of the seat. In the second group, eight of the nine moms and dads were aware of the recall before the discussion started and six of them had made the fix.

Those who had not made the repair explained (somewhat sheepishly) that it didn’t seem critically important – not because they aren’t worried about the safety of their children, but because the recall notice they received didn’t communicate to them that the fix was a “must-do.”

“I would have been more likely to have done the repairs if the notice had not said, ‘Under certain circumstances when...’ I probably focused in on the fact that I never have to pull it at an extreme angle. This photo does not demonstrate anything I would ever do. I overlooked that sentence that is a key sentence and it’s kind of hidden.”

– Female 3

“I was meaning to do it, it was on my to-do list, but I didn’t get to it. Mine hadn’t broken yet so I just didn’t care.”- Female 7

Others agreed that the recall notice could have been clearer in communicating the importance of making the repair. The pictures on the first page led some to believe that the repair had to be made only if the adjuster mechanism separated from the seat. One pointed out the notice included a sentence that read, “This modification should be made without delay.” but it was somewhat hidden on the second page and not bolded or underlined.

“They should put some of the information from the last page on the first. It was more technical than it should have been. They should have made it a little bit more detailed on page one. There are certain words that lead people to glaze over.” – Male 2

“I think this makes it sound like if you’re not having a problem tightening the harness, then there’s not a problem.” – Female 4

The moderator then probed participants on some of the specific language in the recall notice. First, she read the following, directly from the Brand X mailing:

“The recall specifically said that “under certain circumstances, when the harness adjuster strap is pulled from an extreme side angle, the bezel may separate from the restraint shell allowing the adjuster to move out of position inside the shell housing.”

Many admitted this language was a bit confusing, but several also said that in the context of the letter and accompanying the pictures of the car seat it made more sense. The moderator then suggested the following alternate wording, which was not included in the notice, but supplied for purposes of the discussions by CPSC:

“The bezel will separate from the shell, making it difficult to adjust the harness.”

Though several acknowledged that the alternative wording was more to the point, some questioned whether it was too severe and less accurate. It seemed to many that, while more technical and conditional, the first statement was more correct. Had the alternate language appeared in the recall notice, a few noted they would expect that every car seat would absolutely break (rather than that some may break if used a certain way) and would take theirs back. *While the first group of participants appeared to favor the language that was actually included in the notice (opting for accuracy over simplicity), the second group was more divided, suggesting a language that was a little harsher might be more effective at prompting parents to take important action.*

Clearly there is a balance to strike when constructing these notices, with simplicity, comprehensiveness, accuracy, and a sufficient communication of urgency all competing.

Overall Recall Did Not Damage Affinity for Car Seat Maker.

For some, initial feelings of anger, annoyance, or disappointment resulted from learning that the car seat they had just purchased was the subject of a recall. However, most discussants revealed that their general satisfaction with Brand X and its car seats was not irreparably harmed and most would (and some had) bought another Brand X product. The recent spate of toy recalls seems to have led some to consider recalls an unavoidable part of being a consumer and don't automatically write-off a brand or manufacturer just because it experiences a problem. Specifically, Brand X's proactive stance in handling the discovery of a potential safety hazard contributed to continued goodwill.

“I was considering all the other recalls that were happening, but it was a little more positive because they were actually doing something about it. It did beg the question, if this was so easy, why didn't they just do this originally? Why did it take so long to figure this out? Was it a cost-saving mechanism in the production if the holes were there?”

– Male 1

“It didn't make me feel like it was any worse of a company. I was happy that Brand X was keeping up with the problems—every brand has its flaws. However, I was upset with the store that sold it to me.” - Female 12

“I think for me it has to do with what the manufacturer does. If the manufacturer is responsible and makes the modifications, I’ll buy it. Otherwise, I’ll be hesitant to purchase it.” – Male 2

It is important to note that this recall was described by participants as relatively minor and simple to deal with. It is possible that had the circumstances been different, their opinion of Brand X may have been negatively impacted.

For Many Parents, “Recall” Synonymous with “Toys.”

At this point in the discussion, the moderator turned from a specific discussion of the Brand X car seat to the more general subject of recalls. A few participants revealed the Brand X car seat recall was the first they had responded to, while others had been notified and taken action for automobile recalls, including replacement or fix of a potentially defective part or accessory.

Still, as many participants had previously mentioned in the discussion, toy recalls are foremost in their minds. However, unlike the Brand X car seat and automobile recalls, about which they were proactively contacted by the manufacturer, most learned of the hazards posed by certain toys from the media and were then left to check all the items in their children’s toy chest and determine on their own if any action was required.

“This was not the first time I got a recall notice in the mail. But, recently with the toy one, this was nicer because they contacted me. With the toys, you have to go to the website, check out the numbers, go through a long process.” – Male 1

Safety Strongest Motivator of Recall Action; Financial Rewards Have the Potential to Prompt Greater Response.

When the moderator asked participants what prompted them to respond to recalls such as the Brand X car seat and certain automobiles and toys, several discussants seemed stunned by the question as the answer to them was so obvious – the well-being of their families. As parents, their children are always on their minds, guiding what they buy and how they respond to potential threats.

Many admitted that their particular action in the face of a recall depended on the product affected and the hassle involved. The fix of the Brand X car seat was simple and did not cost them anything. When it comes to toys, however, many opted just to throw them out rather than taking them back to the store or shipping them back to the manufacturer for a rebate. For some, it was an issue of dollars – returning a \$10 toy for a refund or a coupon simply isn’t worth their time.

“It has to depend on the product. So many things are disposable. It has to be something very valuable. There are so many things for which I would do nothing. It’s hard to say.” – Female 1

*“I shipped the toys back, and I am supposed to get a rebate. **It is the principle as well as the cost.**” – Female 3*

“For me, [shipping the toys back] was about the principle of it. Shipping was free.” – Male 1

“With rebates, it has to do with the shipping time and how much it actually is. It’s a lot of time that is probably not worth it.” – Male 2

*“I would send it back if it were \$30 or more. If I have to drive 30 minutes in traffic with a screaming kid for something that cost \$5, it isn’t worth it. It’s just going in the trash.”
– Male 3*

The idea of an additional incentive – above and beyond a refund for the returned item – was attractive to some participants. While many admitted they might not actually use a coupon granting them a discount on their next purchase of a particular brand, the gesture as a recognition of their effort was appreciated. Some did point out that the amount of the “extra” would impact their opinion of it.

*“It depends on the amount of the coupon. 10%, probably not. 25% or 30%, maybe.”
– Female 10*

One woman indicated her response to an incentive would depend on the brand making the offer. If it was a “repeat offender” she said she would not be persuaded to buy any more products, not matter how deep the discount.

“They keep finding more and more things to recall with a brand, I’m not going to go out and buy something else from a brand that has persistent recalls. I’d rather have the cash for something else—if I get a coupon for something from that same product line, I’m probably not going to use it.” – Female 11

Another mom in this same group had reservations about offering an incentive. Though she admitted they might work, she felt as though incentives should not be necessary to cause people, especially parents, to be responsible. While others saw her point, most still found financial encouragement an acceptable way to boost response to recalls.

*“I think it’s the parent’s responsibility to register it. If you offer a monetary incentive, it’s enabling behavior that shouldn’t be enabled - parents who ignore responsibility.”
- Female 12*

Responsibility for Notifying Consumers of Recall Divided Amongst Many Parties.

Everyone from product manufacturers to the retailers and from the news media to the government were mentioned as important players in determining which products are/should be recalled and in spreading the word once a recall is implemented. **In this case, more is more with respect to information and responsibility.**

“I would probably go to the website to see if it has anything I’m looking for, look at the manufacturer’s site, and go by what my friends or other parents have said.” – Female 2

At this point, the discussion turned to the many government agencies who take part in the product recall process, including the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Across both groups, only one participant indicated she had never heard of the CPSC, but guessed its role based on the name and content of the discussion. Few, however, had ever had any direct interaction with the agency – mostly they just recognized the name from the news reports about toys. A few participants had visited the CPSC’s website to check out the list of recalled items.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was also generally met with head nods, its name alone clearly communicating its role in keeping consumers safe.

Descriptions of both federal government entities were then read to participants and received with general acknowledgement that the official explanations were what participants’ already understood the agencies to be and to do.

“The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is responsible for protecting the public from the risk of hazards from more than 15,000 types of consumer products under the agency’s jurisdiction. They cover products such as toys, computers, clothing, and general household items. They are not responsible for cars, food, drugs, cosmetics or firearms.”

“The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) mission is to save lives, prevent injuries and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes, through education, research, safety standards and enforcement activity.”

They were then informed that, *“In the case of this particular car seat recall, NHTSA was responsible for the recall. However, the CPSC is responsible for most other children’s safety devices and other consumer products.”* Again, while respondents may not have known this information previously, it did not surprise them.

An announcement that did strike many discussants as “new” was the existence of the website www.recalls.gov – a comprehensive site created by six federal agencies, including the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

A few moms and dads believed they had visited this site (though were not entirely certain), while others had never heard of it, much to their own surprise, given their heightened attention to recalls generally. Many indicated they would check it out in the coming days.

“Is this website new? Because if it isn’t I’m surprised that most of us haven’t heard of it.” – Male 4

The perceived importance of a government imprimatur on a product recall was only mentioned by a single participant, who suggested it would have prompted her to action (she had not made the suggested repair). Others neither agreed nor disagreed – though later in the group many called for increased cooperation and coordination between the government and the product makers.

“If this recall had come from the NHTSA, I probably would have paid more attention to it. If the NHTSA is saying it, then that’s something more pressing. I’m glad [Brand X] did it, though.” – Female 7

In the Internet Age, e-Mail Preferred Method of Recall Notification.

With no close second, the men and women taking part in these discussions said the best way to alert them to a recall was through a message in their e-mail inbox. From a list of eight possible sources written on a flip chart in the focus groups (and shown in the nearby grid), nearly every participant in each group voted e-mail alerts as the top method.

Discussants also suggested a few additional modes of contact including listservs, text message alerts, news reports, and word-of-mouth from those in child-centric industries such as pediatricians and nursery schools. Many of these were acknowledged as good ideas by the groups, but most got no votes whatsoever as the best mode of notification.

Medium	Group 1	Group 2
e-mail Alerts	7	8
Website Link	4	2
Direct Mail	0	5
In-Store Display/Alert	2	1
Newspaper Ad	1	0
Phone Call	1	0
Direct Mail	0	5
Television Ad	0	1
Radio Ad	0	0

Though these moms and dads had a clear preference for e-mail, they acknowledged that no single means of communication would be sufficient to alert everyone to an important recall notice.

Many households are still without regular Internet access, and, more importantly, e-mail alerts are only a possibility for products that consumers’ have registered and provided this contact information.

“E-mail alerts are great because then you can forward it to other people you know.” – Female 2

“Going back to the radio station, it doesn’t necessarily work because there are so many different radio stations.” – Female 1

“There has to be some way to reach people who do not register.” – Male 1

“Unless something tragic happened, the news media probably will not cover the story. Also, it might get lost in the news cycle.” – Female 11

*“Can you give a company your information, even if the product doesn’t have a registration card, so the company will contact you if there is a recall? It would be something I’d elect to do, and I know that I’d probably get some spam, but it would probably be worth it. **I think it’s the manufacturer’s responsibility to do as many things as they can.**” – Female 12*

“I am most likely to look at something that comes in the mail. If I see it’s from [Brand X] and it’s something obvious, I’m more likely to open it. I probably wouldn’t look at e-mail. It needs to be said on one page.” – Male 4

Less is More: Consumers More Apt to Register Products When Not Asked for Extraneous Details.

After the idea of registering a product with the manufacturer was discussed in conjunction with the effectiveness of e-mail alerts, the moderator asked participants to consider registration more deeply. Nearly all recalled registering their Brand X car seats and most said they had also “sent in the card” for other products as well.

The decision to register or not depends on many factors to these folks. The product itself was important to some who admitted they were more likely to alert a manufacturer to their purchase of something like a car seat than a small kitchen appliance or household electronic.

“I only register if I care if there is going to be a recall.” – Female 1

“I think that it’s better to send in the card if it is going to pertain to safety.” – Female 2

“I bought my car seat and a new vacuum cleaner on the same day. I registered my car seat, didn’t register my vacuum and the vacuum broke five months later.” - Male 2

“If it is expensive, then I register it. If it’s under \$100, then I don’t bother.” – Male 4

The method of registration also influenced some. Participants appeared to favor the option of providing information online (several had registered their Brand X car seat through the web), but a few hold-outs insisted that they were more inclined to fill out a card and mail it in.

“If it’s online, then I’ll do it. I don’t do cards any more. I registered my car seat online.” – Male 1

“I do it more now than I did because I can do it online.” – Female 10

“I like the cards – they are harder to put off. With online I might forget.” – Female 13

When the notion of asking shoppers to fill out registration cards at the point of purchase was raised by the moderator, it was roundly rejected by discussants who said the inconvenience would be too high a price to pay for most consumers. A separate idea, to capture purchasers’ information from their credit or debit card, was met with mixed reactions. Some thought it was a good idea, while others worried about the possibility for abuse and identity theft.

“All they need are my address, phone number and model number, I guess that’s fine.”
– Female 8

“You know how all those computers are being stolen with personal information, such as Social Security numbers? I don’t think I’d like that.” – Female 10

“I had bought Iams dog food that had been recalled and I got a notice from the company saying “You may have bought this dog food.” So, I wouldn’t mind them having my information. I feel like it’s already out there any way, might as well make it useful.”
– Female 7

The amount and type of information requested during the registration process also impacted these men and women’s decisions to register a product. The moderator circulated a copy of the card that came along with the Brand X car seat (all car seat manufacturers are required to give consumers the option to register), which asked only for people’s name and mailing address. **All participants agreed they were more inclined to register the car seat (whether by filling out the card or going online) because limited details were requested and a few admitted they had declined to register other products because of the excessive (and seemingly unrelated) information requested, such as household income, ownership of other products, and personal hobbies. The fear of junk mail as a result of product registrations was clear.**

“The downside is that you are targeted for other things, such as ‘Do you play tennis?’”
– Male 1

When the moderator pointed out that the Brand X car seat registration card did not contain a blank for consumers to write their e-mail address, some participants admitted they would not have provided one anyway, despite their clearly expressed preference for e-mailed recall alerts. Others said they would happily provide their e-mail address, especially if the manufacturer pledged not to use their information for any reason other than to alert them of product recalls. Still some said they would not be persuaded by a promise not to “spam” them, but might provide an e-mail contact anyway if the product was one they really cared about – such as a car seat.

“I would not have filled in an e-mail blank if it were on there.” – Female 6

“I’m more likely to do it because it’s going to be used for what it was intended.” –
Female 3

“If it said it was not going to use my e-mail address for purposes other than recall alerts, I would give it to them because they are a reputable company that is true to its word.” –
Female 5

Parting Advice – Upping Attention To and Action on Product Recalls.

As the discussions came to a close, the moderator solicited some final words of wisdom from participants, asking them to offer specific ideas on how to motivate the American people to respond to product recalls generally. The recommendations ranged from pointers on registration cards to a new way to classify the importance of recalls to more widespread promotion of the issue.

- **CREATE A CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR RECALLS TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THOSE THAT ARE MOST PRESSING.**

“We have to change what we define as a ‘recall’ so we can separate true safety hazards from something that is a quick fix. I would not consider this a recall because it’s a relative and minor fix, but I would put it in a critical category because it has to do with consumer safety.” – Female 4

“There should be a degree of ranking, like [Male 1] said, such as a 5 for a critical recall or sent back whereas something lower would be something that isn’t as in need of return. There also needs to be a clearer differentiation between something that is being used incorrectly versus something that is dangerous on its own.” – Female 2

“The scale would be a great idea—have a ‘Category 5’ like a hurricane.” – Male 2

- **MOTIVATE PRODUCT REGISTRATION BY EXCLUDING EXTRANEOUS DETAILS AND USING CONSUMER INFORMATION ONLY FOR ITS INTENDED PURPOSE.**

“Perhaps the manufacturers need to be a bit more proactive in encouraging their consumers to register their products. They need to make it clear that the information is strictly for recall information—leave out all the other market research information—that’s one way to get me to throw it away.” – Female 6

- **PROVIDE FINANCIAL REWARDS TO ACT ON RECALLS.**

“Well I think the number one thing would be an incentive to do it. And, I think the plain, straight-forward language would help.” – Female 13

- **DISSEMINATE THE IMPORTANCE OF RECALLS THROUGH THE MEDIA – ALL FORMS OF IT.**

“Making a concerted effort of using all the communication methods to reach people. They cannot put all their eggs in one basket in terms of media.” – Male 2

“I think the user-group listserv is a really great way. All they have to do is e-mail the moderator and then the moderator sends it out. A lot of people, including myself, belong to those.” – Female 7

“I think a 10-15 second PSA would be good. Something encouraging people to go to recalls.gov for information generally about recalls. I don’t need something flashy or scary, I would just want to hear something about going to recalls.gov.” - Male 3

“I think a PSA showing various toys that have been recalled. I think shock tactics work. ‘Find out about what your child is sticking in his mouth—visit recalls.gov’ that might be enough to get people to think.” – Female 11

“I like the idea of the CPSC doing a PSA. I also like the idea of getting a government alert.” – Female 9

- **INCREASE COOPERATION BETWEEN MANUFACTURERS AND THE CPSC.**

*“I think that part of it is that there are the databases doing what it can with all that it has to do, but it has to make itself known. The manufacturers have a role to play, too. Manufacturers need to help CPSC get the information out, as well as retailers.”
– Male 1*

APPENDIX A – MODERATOR’S GUIDE

the polling company™, inc. for the Consumer Product Safety Commission
“Recall Effectiveness”
Brand X Model D Car Seat
Group Discussion Guide

Introduction & Explanation of Session (5 minutes)

Ask each participant to introduce themselves to the group:

- Name
- Employment Status/Occupation: retired, full-time or part-time work, homemaker?
- Residence: How long have you lived in the Washington, D.C. area? Where are you from originally? What brought you here?
- Family: number of people in household; married, kids, grandchildren, children living at home?

General Opinions (10 minutes)

To begin, how up-to-date do you consider yourself to be on current events and issues facing your local area, the United States, and the world in general? What do you do, if anything, to keep up on news and media? What’s the biggest barrier for you in getting information about news and events?

Please pretend for a moment that you have just entered a new stage in your life, perhaps you got married, bought a home, became a parent, or started a new job. Assume you are going to be making some purchases of brand new products to go along with this change – where would you go for more information? (If respondents rely on Internet: Where would you go if you didn’t have a computer?) Would you confer with friends, family members, call a 1-800 number or expert, contact the company? Why? What would you ask them?

As a consumer, what is your greatest concern? What worries you most when you buy a product? Anything else?

What does the term “consumer safety” mean to you? How do you know when it exists? Is it blind faith? Some sort of tangible? Something you see or hear? Certain trusted brands? Do you know it by reading product instructions or going online to see if the product has been recalled?

Product Safety Recall Behavior (80 minutes)

Knowledge Testing – 10 minutes

I'd like to switch topics now and ask if any of you have ever heard of the term "product recalls," sometimes called "product safety recalls?" How would you define this term to those who might be unfamiliar? Anything else?

To be sure that we are all operating under the same set of facts, a "product recall" is the request that consumers return a product to the maker (manufacturer) for a new one, contact the manufacturer regarding repair of the product, or collect a refund due to the discovery of a potential safety hazard or because the product is defective.

Based on this information, do you remember seeing, reading, or hearing anything in the media regarding product safety recalls? How long ago? What do you remember about what you saw or heard? Did you respond in any way to this information? If so, how did you respond?

Notification - 15 minutes

We have asked you to come here today because you were sent a written product recall notice for a Brand X Model D Car Seat. Is anyone familiar with the recall of the car seat? What do remember about it? Is this the first time for anyone having heard of the car seat recall?

Do you remember receiving any information about it in the past? Where did you hear about or see it (probe: written notice, television/radio, newspaper, friends/family, website, etc.)?

What do you remember about the recall specifically? If you were to describe the recall notice to someone who knew nothing about the situation, how would you describe it?

To be sure that we are all operating under the same set of facts, the recall had to do with the Model D car seat harness. The harness adjuster housing (i.e., the bezel) can pop out of position which makes it difficult to adjust the harness to fit snugly around the child. In the event of a vehicle crash, a loose harness around the child could increase the risk of injury.

Thinking back to when you first heard about this recall, what was your initial reaction? What were your concerns and questions? How did you react?

Did the recall notice give you any instructions about what to do or how to handle the situation? What, if any, options were offered to you?

Were you aware of this hazard? Had you experienced the problem of the “bezel” separating from the seat? If so, did you take any action to remedy the situation prior to receiving the notice?

Pass out specific recall notice sent to participants directly from Brand X. Do you recognize this notice? Have you ever seen it before? If so, where do you remember seeing it?

Thinking back to when you received this notice, did you actually read the letter? If so, did you read the entire notice or just a part of it? Why? If not, why did you decide not to read it? Anything else?

After you received this notice, what was your initial reaction/response? How did reading it make you feel: nervous, anxious, relieved, etc.?

I’d like you to think about this specific notice on a scale of one to five, with “one” being “not at all helpful” and “five” being “very helpful,” how helpful was this notice in alerting you to the car seat recall?

What, if anything, did you need more information on or what questions did you still have? Did you search for more information? If so, where?

Consumer Response - 35 minutes

By a show of hands, how many of you took some type of action after hearing about the Brand X car seat recall? Specifically, what did you do? (Mention the following if not discussed unprompted: returned car seat? Followed the instructions with the repair kit? Contacted Brand X and received the repair kit? Did you stop using it while you waited for the repair kit? Fix it yourself? Asked for recommendations from friend or family?) Anything else?

For those who DID NOT respond:

Why did you choose to not take any action? Would you say that the car seat recall itself or your own individual life circumstances at the time were the bigger reason for your decision NOT to take action?

Which of the following was the biggest reason for your decision not to take action: time/commitment, cost, safety was not a concern, or something else? Please explain.

Did you have any particular experience in the past that made you less inclined to respond to the recall?

Please finish this sentence: If I were to receive another recall notice tomorrow about ANY product I own, the one thing that would motivate me to respond is _____.
Probes: additional information in notice, more media attention, greater concern for family/friends, more convenient, etc.? Anything else?

For those who DID respond:

What motivated you to respond to the car seat recall? Did you act immediately after reading the notice or did you wait? If there was a delay, why didn't you act immediately?

What information was particularly important for you to know before you responded to the Brand X car seat recall? Did you seek out any more information than what was in the letter? For example, did you look online (specify websites), in newspapers, talk to friends or family, contact manufacturer, government officials, or retailer? How did you know where to go or where to look? Did you actually receive information that was helpful to you? What?

Did you talk to anyone else about the Brand X car seat recall? If so, what did you say? Did you try to find others who may have received the notice? If so, why and how? Was finding others who were in the same situation important to you?

How many of you received the repair kit with the notice? Did that influence your behavior? If the repair kit hadn't come with the notice, would you have requested the repair kit?

For those of you who did not receive the repair kit, did you request the repair kit? How long did it take to get it?

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being "very easy" and 5 being "not easy at all", how easy would you say it was to follow the repair kit instructions?

Did you experience any problems?

Did you seek out the assistance of anyone to remedy the situation? If so, who? What was the final outcome? Were they helpful/unhelpful/other? Did they make it easier to take the necessary steps?

Did anyone watch the video on the website? Was that helpful?

The recall specifically said that "**under certain circumstances**, when the harness adjuster strap is **pulled from an extreme side angle**, the bezel may separate from the restraint shell allowing the adjuster to move out of position inside the shell housing." Did anyone find this confusing? Or did you understand exactly what was meant? Did the pictures in the notice help?

What if the recall had just said "the bezel **will** separate from the shell, making it difficult to adjust the harness"? Would your reaction have been different? If so, how? If not, why?

In general, how important is the specific reason for the recall to your decision of how to react? Why or why not?

After reading the Brand X car seat recall notice, did you check if any other products you owned had been recalled? What motivated you to do this? Which products did you examine specifically? Why those and not others? Where/how did you check about other recalls?

Looking back, would you have done anything differently? If you were to have received information about a similar recall (such as for another child safety device) would you take the same action? Why or why not?

Did the recall affect your relationship with the retailer, product manufacturer, or some other company involved in the recall? Anything else?

Does a recall influence your impression about Brand X? In general, are you likely to have a more positive or more negative impression of Brand X after learning about the product recall, or does it make no difference? Why?

Are you more or less likely to buy a product from a manufacturer, such as Brand X, that has issued a recall OR the retailer, or does it make any difference? Why?

Thinking more generally now, is this the first time you had ever responded to a recall? If not, do you typically respond to recalls? Describe the situation when you last responded. What was the product being recalled? Where did you find information about the recall? What was your initial reaction? What action did you take? What was the result?

Consumer Motivation - 5 minutes

Would you be more or less likely to respond to the recall if you were offered an incentive to do so? What would that incentive have to be to interest you?

If I were to tell you that you would receive a rebate from the manufacturer in return for the recalled item, how likely would you be to consider following through with the return?

Now let's make some assumptions: 1) You feel that you or a family member is at risk of injury from the product OR 2) You feel that you or a family member is not at risk of injury from the product. Also, let's say the rebate would be for the full price of the product. What if the rebate was 20% of the price (for example, you would receive a \$5.00 rebate for a \$25.00 shirt).

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) (25 minutes)

Based on what you know, who do you think is responsible for determining that a product should be recalled? Who do you think is responsible for communicating recalls to the public? Who do you think should be responsible for communicating recalls to the public? Why?

How familiar are you with the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) (very, somewhat, just a little bit, not at all)? How and when did you first learn about it? What, specifically, did you see or hear about the CPSC?

How familiar are you with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) (very, somewhat, just a little bit, not at all)? How and when did you first learn about it? What, specifically, did you see or hear about NHTSA?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) mission is to save lives, prevent injuries and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes, through education, research, safety standards and enforcement activity.

In the case of this particular car seat recall, NHTSA was responsible for the recall. However, the CPSC is responsible for most other children's safety devices and other consumer products.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is responsible for protecting the public from the risk of hazards from more than 15,000 types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. They cover products such as toys, computers, clothing, and general household items. They are not responsible for cars, drugs, cosmetics or firearms.

Given this information, how likely would you be to look into information about CPSC? Have you ever heard of CPSC's toll free hotline? Website? Have you ever used their website or contacted CPSC directly? Please tell us about the experience(s).

If you were to learn that the CPSC was a federal government agency, would you be more or less favorable to them? Why or why not?

Pretend for a moment that you were just named the Chairman of the CPSC and were responsible for getting information out to the public on hundreds of recalls a year. What would you do to get this information to the people that need it most? Anything else?

As you may or may not know, there is a website, www.recalls.gov which posts information about recalls, and allows visitors to sign up for email notifications and search information about consumer products safety. Based on this information alone, does this sound like a website you would likely use? Why or why not? What information would you hope to find?

What if you were told that six federal agencies, including the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) came together to develop the www.recalls.gov website. Do you think this is a good thing? Why or why not? Would this information make you more or less interested in going on and using the website? Why?

Messaging to Consumers (25 minutes)

Thinking about the next time you purchase an infant/child product similar to a Brand X car seat, how likely will you be to seek out information about whether there are any safety concerns either with that product, brand, or manufacturer? Please explain. Where would you go to look?

Please finish the following sentence: The best way to contact me about a recall is ____? Imagine for a moment that you own a product that is going to be recalled tomorrow and the manufacturer is looking to alert you so that you can return the product. Considering a typical day in your life, what would need to be done to make sure that the recall information got into your hands?

Probe: Ask participants to vote for the top method of contacting them about product recalls? (Write on flip chart)

- Email alerts
- TV Ad
- Radio Ad
- Newspaper Ad
- Website Link
- Direct Mail (specify source)
- Phone call
- In-store display/alert

You may or may not know that a product safety registration card is one way to get recall information to the people that own products. The cards are typically given to consumers when they make some purchases and one purpose is so that the manufacturer can identify owners of products that are later recalled. Have you ever registered a product? If so, where? How did you complete the registration? Do you register some products and not others? If so, which products are you likely to register?

Car seat manufacturers are required by Federal law to provide a registration card (show card) on all brand-new car seats sold.

How many of you purchased your car seats new from a retailer? How many purchased or got your car seat second-hand? Where did you get it? (*Probe: Thrift store, yard sale, family, friend, state or local program?*)

If you purchased your car seat new, how many of you remember seeing the registration card? How many of you filled it out and mailed it back to the manufacturer? Why or why not?

Did you notice that this registration card did not ask any questions about your personal buying habits? Did that influence whether you filled it out or not?

What form of registration would you be more likely to use – filling out a card and mailing back to the manufacturer or using the manufacturer’s website to register the product? Why or why not?

If similar registration cards (i.e., no personal buying habit questions, just contact information) were provided on other infant and toddlers products such as cribs, high chairs, etc., would you be inclined to fill them out and return them to the manufacturer? Why or why not?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Finally, I would like to thank all of you again for participating in what has been a productive exchange of ideas and opinions. I’d like to go around the room and have everyone name one or two things that would make you more likely to respond to a product recall or any advice you would give to the CPSC on how they might be able to motivate more people to respond to product recalls? It can be related to something we talked about today or something else that is on your mind. (For those who say nothing, ask them why it is not worth it to them to respond to product recalls).

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN TODAY’S DISCUSSION!

APPENDIX B – RECALL NOTICE & REGISTRATION CARD

August 2007

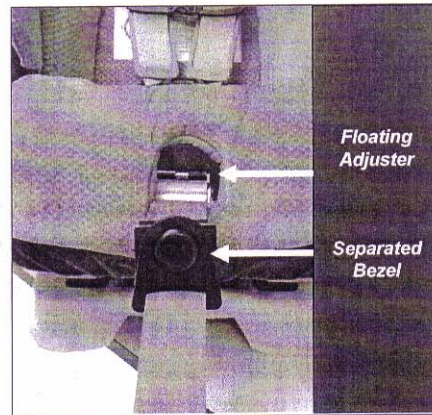
Subject: SAFETY RECALL NOTICE
Recall No. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Child Restraint
Model Numbers beginning with [REDACTED]
Manufacture Dates: February 12, 2005 – July 31, 2007

Dear [REDACTED] Owner:

This notice is sent to you in accordance with the requirements of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act. [REDACTED] has decided that a defect, which relates to motor vehicle safety, exists in some [REDACTED] child restraints. According to our records, your child restraint system may be affected.

What Is The Problem?

Under certain circumstances, when the harness adjuster strap is pulled from an extreme side angle, the bezel may separate from the child restraint shell allowing the adjuster to move out of position inside the shell housing. Under these circumstances, caregivers may experience some difficulty while trying to properly adjust the harness. If this were to occur, the harness may be loose around the child resulting in an increased risk of injury.



A simple modification utilizing two push rivet fasteners (one extra is included) to secure the adjuster to the child restraint is enclosed with this notification. This quick modification will prevent the possibility of having the adjuster come out of position from the child restraint shell.

When securing the child, slowly pull the harness adjuster strap to tighten the harness around the child, when possible, straight out from the restraint and parallel to the ground. This will also minimize the bezel separating from the child restraint.

SAFETY RECALL NOTICE

Recall No. [REDACTED]

Child Restraint

Model Numbers beginning with [REDACTED]

Manufactured Date: February 12, 2005 – July 31, 2007

What You Should Do

Instructions and the push rivet fasteners will be available beginning August 17, 2007 to all affected owners of [REDACTED] child restraint. This modification should be made without delay. Video instructions are available on our website, at [REDACTED] to assist you in this process. This modification will take less than five minutes to complete.

Questions

Please contact our information line at [REDACTED] with questions concerning this notice. The model and manufacture date from your restraint is required when calling. This information may be found on the white label located on the child's left hand side near the top of the restraint shell under the cover.

Additional information can be found at [REDACTED]

If you believe that we have failed or are unable to remedy this potential defect without charge or within a reasonable time, you may submit a complaint to: Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20590 or call the toll free Vehicle Safety Hotline at 1-888-327-4236 (TTY: 1-800-424-9153), or go to <http://www.safercar.gov>.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

R1: 08/07
P305900

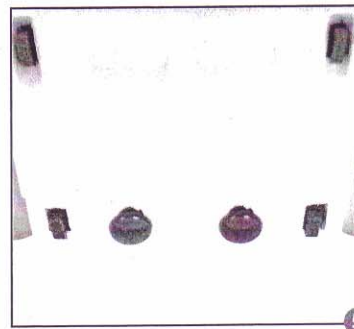
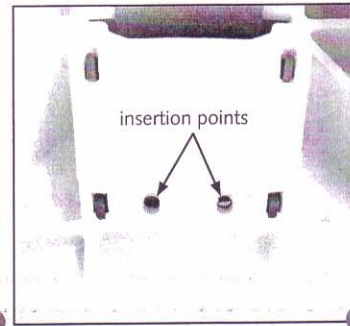
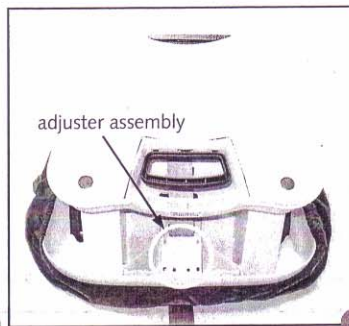
Push Rivet Installation For Child Restraint

Figure 1 shows items needed for push rivet fastener installation. Included in kit:

- push rivet fasteners (3, 1 extra)

Push Rivet Installation

1. Place restraint front-side down on a flat surface (fig 2).
2. Locate holes where push rivets will be inserted (fig. 3).
3. Insert push rivet into hole and push down with thumb until it is flush with shell (fig 4). A positive click confirms installation.
4. Repeat for the second push rivet (fig 5).



IMPORTANT!

In case of a recall, we can reach you only if we have your name and address. You **MUST** send in the attached card to be on our recall list.

We've already paid the postage.

Do it today.

FOR YOUR CHILD'S CONTINUED SAFETY

Please take a few moments to promptly fill out and return the attached card.

Although child restraint systems undergo testing and evaluation, it is possible that a child restraint could be recalled.

In case of recall, we can reach you only if we have your name and address, so please send in the card to be on our recall list.

Please fill this card out and mail it NOW, while you are thinking about it.

It's already addressed and we've paid the postage.



NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE



Tear off and mail this part.

Consumer: Just fill in your name and address.

Your Name: _____

Your Street Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____



CHILD RESTRAINT REGISTRATION CARD

Serial #:

Model #:

Batch #:

Manufactured In: 10/26/07

Manufactured in Charlotte, NC, USA



Check



I have been trained by the store in the installation of this restraint.

#4 04/01

P200700