



CASE STUDY: Fit for a Kid® Program DaimlerChrysler & National Safety Council

Safety in Numbers - Who's Counting?

In 1999, when DaimlerChrysler joined the National Safety Council (NSC) in launching the Fit for a Kid® Program, they were motivated by some startling statistics. Eight out of ten child safety seats examined were found incorrectly installed or improperly used in vehicles across the United States. Worse yet, 97 percent of the parents surveyed believed that they were using their child seats safely. Poorly installed infant seats can result in serious injury or death to the occupants. With millions of vehicles on the road carrying children, there were a significant number of young people at risk.



To meet this challenge, the NSC and DaimlerChrysler developed the Fit for a Kid Program. Through a nationwide network of five star DaimlerChrysler dealers, parents could have their child safety seats inspected for free by a certified technician – regardless of the make or model vehicle they drive. The inspection covered the installation of the seat and proper fitting for the age and weight of the child. Like most auto services, the inspections were done by appointment.

Response to the program was very positive. As a result, DaimlerChrysler, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the National Safety Council, Graco Children's Products Inc., and Lamaze™ International joined forces to expand access to the service and to promote it to parents. In 2000, the NHTSA created an inspection locator as part of its Web site to help parents find safety seat inspection locations. The locator includes a list of organizations and other entities that offer seat inspections. It is the most comprehensive list of inspection resources throughout the country.



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Is the program working properly? What kind of field data is being collected? What trends are the certified technicians finding? These are all good questions that have not been overlooked by a group as thorough as the Fit for a Kid team. Naturally, the NSB and NHTSA already track enormous amounts of data regarding safety issues. There is "safety in numbers" as the statistics tracked by these agencies have led to many improvements in product design and implementation that save lives.

To capture the inspection program's information, the Fit for a Kid group turned to Systems Imaging Inc., a Pittsburgh-based integrator of document imaging solutions, for help. Working with child safety seat experts, an extensive series of survey questions were developed to track the findings of the technicians who performed inspections. The survey tracks everything from driver information, child statistics, and seat configuration to the use of locking clips and tether straps. The inspection forms were then custom-designed for rapid scanning and data capture.

Using high-speed scanners and the OCR for Forms™ product from Microsystems Technology, the surveys are scanned; the data is extracted and output as an ASCII text file. The text file is imported into MS/Access where reports have been developed to tabulate the results. Images and pertinent data from the text are also imported to the OTG Application Extender product for quick retrieval. There are 124 separate fields being captured – including hand printed text and mark sense box question responses. As the data grows, it can be used to compare the inspection results against the number of injuries and fatalities that are tracked by insurance and safety agencies.

To date, over 40,000 Fit for a Kid inspection forms have been processed by **Systems Imaging Scanning Services Department**. They arrive from all over the U.S. by mail, and are scanned, indexed and tabulated each month. Reports and a database are then sent to both DaimlerChrysler and the NSC. "We have a long way to go before all of the child seats in the U.S. are safe" states Daneen Thumm, project manager of scanning services at Systems Imaging. "But I feel that we are making a difference - especially for those who have taken advantage of this service. If one child's life is saved, the effort is more than worthwhile."

To find more information about the Fit for a Kid program, and other resources related to seatbelt safety, you can go their website, www.fitforakid.com or the NHTSA website www.seatcheck.org. At these sites you can access the locator system to identify the inspections stations that are nearest to you. You will also find a list of safety tips, web resources, and a database of seat product recalls that is organized by company and product. Many of the recall listings include a toll free number for consumers. The Seat Check organization can also be reached at their toll free number 1-866-SEAT-CHECK.



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