

Report: Car design makes child seats hard to install

LATIMES 4/12/12

By JERRY HIRSCH

Child safety seats are difficult to properly install in cars, according to an insurance industry research group, because of the design of most passenger seats.

Joint research conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute found that just 21 of 98 top-selling 2010 and 2011 model-year vehicles have seat designs that are easy to use with child restraints.

The low percentage was notable, considering that the auto industry is using a system called Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children — or LATCH — that was intended to make it easier to install the safety seats.

The problem, according to the insurance trade group, is that the manufacturers haven't paid enough attention to how the LATCH system works when designing passenger seats.

"Installing a child restraint isn't always as simple as a couple of clicks and you're done," said Anne McCartt, the insurance in-

stitute's senior vice president for research and one of the report's authors.

The vehicles were tested by 36 volunteers, each of whom was asked to install three styles of child restraints in three vehicles. All of the participants use child seats in their own vehicles. If they had questions about how to install the seats, they could consult owners' manuals but received no other aid.

Only 13% of the volunteers installed seats with lower anchors and top tethers to get a tight, secure fit at the right angle, according to the insurance group.

The researchers found that the lower anchors used to attach the restraint systems were often set too deep in the seats to be easily accessible. Lower anchors — metal tabs that are used to secure the child seat to the vehicle — were visible in just 36 of the 98 study vehicles.

The designs of the passenger seats also sometimes required those installing the restraints to make too big an effort to properly attach child seat hardware to the lower anchors.

jerry.hirsch@latimes.com