

Collapsing Car Seats Blamed for Injuring Passengers

Person in front seat becomes "missile" to rear passengers, attorney says

By **LISA PARKER**

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The things that come easily to most 5-year-olds are now a struggle for [Aaliyah George](#). The Virginia kindergartner has a hard time getting dressed, frosting a cookie or even banging on a play drum, says her mother, Sally George, after an automobile accident three years ago left the child with brain damage.

The family was stopped at a red light when another car traveling at just under 30 miles per hour rear-ended their 1997 Plymouth Neon. The crash itself was not major, George said, but the injuries to her daughter were. The reason, the family's lawyer says, has to do with a part of the car that has been overlooked by safety standards. "The front seat occupant becomes the missile that goes back and hits the brain of the child in the head," explained the Georges' attorney, [Bob Langdon](#).

Scores of children have suffered injuries similar to Aaliyah George's because the front driver's or passenger's seat collapses when it should absorb rear-impact, sending the driver or passenger careening into the child seated behind their seat, he said. "We're seeing severe injuries to the frontal lobes of the brain and it's just devastating to these young children. [They're] brain-damaged for life," Langdon said.

Conventional wisdom holds that the backseat is the safest place for children to travel. And with airbags in the front and on the sides in many models, cars have never been safer. But [NBC Chicago](#) has learned there is no safety standard that addresses what can happen to the passengers who sit behind the driver and front passenger seats if those seats don't hold up in an accident.



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“Either the seat or the body, the head, or both are going to smack into whoever is sitting behind them. Most of the time, these days, that’s going to be a child,” said plaintiff’s witness and engineer Lou D’Aulerio. D’Aulerio testified in the Georges’ lawsuit that the current federal safety standard for seat back strength is weak and outdated, and showed a test in which a lawn chair and a seat made of cardboard both passed that test.

The pertinent standard, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 207, went into effect in 1968. A spokesperson for the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) said the agency is considering a move to update the standard. D’Aulerio said he and other automotive experts have been urging the agency to change FMVSS 207 for decades and that change is long overdue. He said he would only believe action from NHTSA when he sees it.

The Georges sued the company that made the car seat for Chrysler, Milwaukee-based [Johnson Controls Incorporated](#), alleging the driver’s seating system was defective and unreasonably dangerous, and had the propensity to fail and collapse backward during crashes, causing occupants to be injured.

The jury that heard the case agreed with the Georges and awarded \$8 million to the little girl. Johnson Controls said it plans to appeal the verdict. “As a seat supplier, Johnson Controls followed the design specifications provided to it by the car manufacturer and met every performance requirement,” the company said in a statement. “We, as a seat supplier, do not make the decisions about the strength of the seat back. That is the industry practice in the relationship between a supplier and a vehicle manufacturer. It is undisputed that the seat in question was in compliance with the car manufacturer’s safety requirements which are more stringent than Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS).”

Source: <http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local-beat/minor-accident-major-injury-car-seat-107083508.html>

Lou D’Aulerio, Senior Engineer with ARCCA, Inc. is a Crash Safety Engineer with a focus on occupant crash protection. He can be reached through your Regional ARCCA Representative or at TJennings@ARCCA.com