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CHICAGO PEDIATRICIAN LEADS FIGHT TO IMPROVE SHOPPING CART SAFETY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

New Shopping Cart Design Can Prevent Many of the 30,000 Yearly Injuries in US

CHICAGO- Fighting an arduous battle, a local pediatrician is trying to persuade shopping cart manufacturers and executives at major store chains to adopt a design change to shopping carts that could significantly reduce the number of children, more than 30,000 a year, who are injured in shopping cart accidents.

After treating numerous shopping cart related injuries over the years, Dr. Joseph W. Russell, of Plainfield, Ill., learned that the current shopping carts pose a serious health risk to children five years of age and under due to the dangerously high center of gravity for the seated child.

“Clearly, the present day shopping cart and child seat design presents a serious risk of injury due to the tip-over hazard, and falls from the seat.” Dr. Russell said, noting that the accompanying safety belts do not alter nor address the dangerously high center of gravity. “Working with engineers, we have developed a cart with a redesigned rear gate, and other modifications, that can prevent a substantial number of injuries in the future.”

But despite a minimal increase in cost for producing safer carts, neither the shopping cart manufacturers nor retailers, have expressed interest in adopting the new design, which can prevent this type of injury. Manufacturers appear content, preferring to shift the onus to education as opposed to a cart re-design.

“It is very frustrating,” said Dr. Russell, who has discussed the issue with retailers and cart manufacturers. “We have the ability to prevent many of these injuries to children, and I believe we have a responsibility to try. We are launching a campaign to increase awareness that current shopping carts pose a health risk, and that a cost effective solution is readily available.”

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has determined that shopping cart falls are among the leading causes of head injuries to young children — with no signs of decreasing. Of the nearly 33,000 injuries in 2002, 6,300 were internal head injuries; there were also 1,292 concussions, 355 skull fractures and 161 femur fractures. Moreover,

CPSC estimates that 17,000 children are treated in emergency rooms each year after falls from shopping carts.

“While CPSC tallies the injuries, they don’t track the complications these children may have later in life.” Dr. Russell said. “In some instances, these kids suffer significant harm that can negatively impact their lives. This health hazard is unnecessary.”

Dr. Russell urged that “stronger action” is needed by the government, manufacturers and retailers to better protect children. “Many of these injuries are foreseeable and preventable,” he said. “The government, manufacturers and retailers just need the desire to make shopping carts safer.”