

CHP warns against leaving children alone in cars

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Local California Highway Patrol officers are joining a nationwide effort to protect children from heat stroke.

4 R Kids Sake, a national, nonprofit organization, has designated August as Purple Ribbon Month to raise awareness and educate the public about the dangers of leaving a child unattended in or around a motor vehicle.

In recognition of Purple Ribbon Month, the California Highway Patrol will attach purple ribbons to the antennas of its patrol cars.

“We want people to ask us what the purple ribbons are for,” Porterville CHP Public Information Officer Stefanie Buck said.

Research by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration in 2007 showed that hyperthermia, or heat stroke, among children is the leading cause of non-crash vehicle deaths, according to a CHP news release.

Every year in the U.S., an average of 27 children die as a result of hyperthermia or excessive heat while in a vehicle, CHP reports.

“People don’t realize that over a short amount of time it can be 20 degrees hotter in a vehicle as compared to outside,” Buck said.

The Unattended Child in a Motor Vehicle Safety Act took effect Jan. 1, 2002.

The law became known as Kaitlyn’s Law in memory of 6-month-old Kaitlyn Russell of Corona, who died Aug. 15, 2000 after being left alone in her baby sitter’s car for about two hours.

Kaitlyn’s Law makes leaving a child in an unattended vehicle without the supervision of someone at least 12 years old an infraction, punishable by a fine of \$100 for any parent, legal guardian or other person responsible for a child 6 years old or younger, CHP reports.

“We’re trying to raise awareness about Kaitlyn’s Law,” Buck said. “We’re trying to get the word out.”

-- Contact The Recorder newsroom at 784-5000, Ext. 1043.