

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Highway Safety Gives Away 171 Car Seats, Promotes Child Safety

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ST. CROIX -- The little office in Frederiksted was filled with parents looking for new car seats for their children. And since the Virgin Islands Office of Highway Safety (OHS) was giving them away free of charge, as well as tips on how to best secure children while driving, the travel to this island's west side made sense.

OHS gave away about 171 car seats to parents with children yesterday, aided by technicians from Head Start, St. Croix Rescue, VI Fire Service and the Virgin Islands Police Department, as well as police cadets, who helped the organization's Territorial Occupant Protection Coordinator, Leslie Dickenson and other volunteers, make the event a success.

The program, sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration -- which sees the government agency paying for the 171 seats every year -- is part of Child Passenger Safety Week, where parents are encouraged to buckle up their children and keep them properly placed in car seats along with adequate restraint. Safety Week is recognized throughout the mainland, however, according to Dickenson, only the territory gives away free car seats, while the rest of the nation do presentations and other activities.

To get free seats, parents were required to bring their child/children, car registration, insurance and birth certificate so that car seats could be suitably distributed.

And in relation to sitting children safely, Instructor Delita Borroughs, who joined OHS in 2008 as a technician, said the best area to place a child in a vehicle is in the center if it's only one child, or in the center and behind the driver's seat for two children.

"The reason you want to place the child in a car seat at the back of the driver is because they are away from the flow of traffic," Borroughs said. "And children of up to 1 year and 20 pounds must be facing rear," she added.

The weight and age must match up, too, Borroughs went on. "You might have a child who may be ten months and 25 pounds, but they still have to face rear because they have not reached the required age. Now, you might have one who is already 1 year old but weighs 15 pounds, they will also have to face rear because the requirement of 1 year and 20 pounds must match up."

As for sitting children in the middle, Borroughs said it's the best area to place a child because it's the safest location of protection in a vehicle -- away from both the passenger and driver's side of impact.

The event continues in St. John on Thursday, and St. Thomas on Friday.

Feature Image: From Left, Territorial Occupant Protection Coordinator Leslie Dickenson, a child and Instructor Delita Borroughs.