

Accidents that kill or injure very young children are particularly troubling. Children who are not yet school age are highly vulnerable to all sorts of dangers - including being run over by a car that is backing up.

The federal data on the prevalence of back-up car accidents is eye-opening. According to estimates by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 228 people are killed in car accidents each year and 17,000 people are injured. The agency's data indicates that almost half of these deaths - about 100 - are of children under 5 years old. Children in this at-risk age group also account for about 2,000 of the injuries each year.

NHTSA proposes to do something about this by requiring new vehicles to have back-up cameras that will significantly improve the view drivers have when backing up. The agency formally proposed such a rule last month. The authority to do so came from legislation passed by Congress called the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act of 2007, which directed the agency to implement a regulation to improve rear visibility when a vehicle is backing up.

NHTSA considered several other options involving additional mirrors or the installation of object-detectors before settling on the back-up camera proposal.

The rationale for the proposal is clearly based on protecting children. In summarizing the data on the number of back-up accidents, the agency pointed to the high percentage of deaths that involve young children. But the proposed back-up cameras will also make vehicles safer for people of all ages.

Of course, it takes dollars to do this. NHTSA acknowledges that the price of the cameras will be substantial. To an individual consumer, the cost of the cameras is expected to range from \$159 to \$203. The cost could be less, however, if a vehicle already has some type of back-up camera in place that could be adapted to meet the new requirement.

The price of the cameras is surely worth it, because estimates suggest that they will save about 100 lives a year and prevent nearly 9,000 injuries. And many of those who will avoid harm due to the new cameras will be young children.

The safety agency will not go ahead with the plan all at once. It will be implemented in phases. The timetable calls for 10 percent of new vehicles to have the cameras by September 2012. The percentage is supposed to rise 40 percent by September 2013 and reach 100 percent by September 2014.