

STAYING COOL IN CARS



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Dick Hammer, general manager of Hammer's Chevrolet, shows off a 2011 Chevy Malibu to Safe Kids of Sheridan County Coordinator Danielle Bowers and Wellness Council of Sheridan County Executive Director Teddy Araas, right, Tuesday afternoon at his car lot. The car will be one of three on loan by Hammer to use for Saturday's Hyperthermia Awareness Event from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. outside of Wal-Mart.

• Local event aims to raise awareness of hyperthermia

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SHERIDAN — A recent study revealed that approximately 40 children die of hyperthermia each year after being left unattended in vehicles. In 2010, 49 children died this way, an all-time high, according to Safe Kids USA, a partner of the Wellness Council of Sheridan County.

To prevent such fatalities in Sheridan County, the Wellness Council is hosting a Hyperthermia Awareness Event from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday outside of Wal-Mart in Sheridan.

"Wyoming hasn't had any deaths yet, but we definitely have had some close calls that aren't monitored like the deaths," said Teddy Araas, executive director of the Wellness Council, who encourages community members to attend the event.

Positioned between the two front doors at Wal-Mart, the event will feature three cars on loan from Hammer Chevrolet with various

degrees of lowered windows. Local medical and law enforcement representatives will explain to passersby the consequences of a child left unattended in a car in various conditions.

It is free and open to the public. The Wellness Council will give out teddy bears every half hour, and there will be brochures and packets of information about hyperthermia.

As time passes, hyperthermia, the condition of having an above-normal body temperature, may exacerbate to heat stroke, which occurs when a person's temperature exceeds 104 degrees, according to the Mayo Clinic. Once a body temperature reaches the fatal 107 degrees, internal organs begin to shut down.

It is widely believed that parking in a shady spot with cracked windows will suffice for a child's safety, but Safe Kids USA statistics prove otherwise.

Within 10 minutes, a vehicle interior's temperature can rise 19 degrees, according to a Safe Kids USA study. In one to two hours, the temperature can rise 45-50 degrees.

A child's body temperature does not regulate in the same way as an adult's, the study continues: A child's temperature can warm at a rate of three to five times that of an adult's. Children have died from heat stroke in a vehicle with outside temperatures as low as 57 degrees.

"It's awful," said Araas. "Our children are our future, and we can do better to protect them."

"It's not just up to the parents. Everyone in Sheridan County needs to heighten their awareness of this," she added, encouraging community members who see an unattended child — or a pet — in a vehicle to call 911 with the vehicle's location and license plate number.

Sgt. Tom Henry of the Sheridan Police Department said that the offending parent or guardian would probably be cited with a misdemeanor of child endangerment or animal neglect.

"We get a lot of calls in at this time of year about pets," said Henry.

Hyperthermia

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Lt. Mark Conrad of the Sheridan County Sheriff's Office agreed, but he added that there are "so many variables. Each case is independent of itself," he explained. "It's totally dependant on certain facts in the case. A 17-year-old counts as a child in Wyoming, which would be completely different from leaving a four-year-old alone in a car."

The first fatal case of hyperthermia this year was in March in Texas: A mother came back to her car after a day of work to find that she forgot to drop her six-month-old at day

care.

Safe Kids USA recommends that parents keep something they need before they leave their car near the car seat of their child in order to remember to drop them off and not forget them in the car.

Parents can also set alarms on cell phones or request that day cares or babysitters call in if the child is late to his or her session.

"You can even leave reminders on your dashboard," said Araas. "There are so many options. Our children deserve our care and to be kept safe from dying in a car."