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## IIHS members only

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### **NHTSA SHIFTS POLICY ON CHILD RESTRAINT REPLACEMENT**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently announced that there's no need to replace child restraints after minor crashes. The new policy, which reflects in part the results of research demonstrating restraint durability, reverses what the agency previously recommended in training manuals. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) conducted the research on restraint durability.

In 1999 testimony before the California legislature, NHTSA representatives said the agency had completed no tests concerning child restraint replacement and took no position other than to defer to restraint manufacturers' recommendations (see Advisory 26, Sept. 1999). Most of the manufacturers say child seats involved in crashes, no matter how minor, should be replaced. While there was no official NHTSA position, the agency did refer to child restraints in its training manual for child passenger safety inspectors as "one time use" products that should be replaced after crashes. The 2004 printing of the manual reflects the new policy.

NHTSA says it made the policy change "to ensure that parents or caregivers continue to correctly restrain their child following a minor crash. It will also reduce the financial burden of unnecessary child safety seat replacement" (for more, go to [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/ChildRestraints/ReUse/index.htm](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/ChildRestraints/ReUse/index.htm)). The agency defines a minor crash as one from which a vehicle can be driven away, the vehicle door nearest the child is undamaged, no occupants are injured, and the airbags didn't deploy. A restraint in a crash that meets all of these criteria can be used again if there are no visible cracks or deformation that might have been caused by the crash.

In crash tests conducted by the Institute and ICBC, child restraints showed remarkable durability, remaining undamaged or sustaining only minor damage after low- and high-speed tests. Even after repeated high-speed tests, the dummies remained well restrained. The Institute concluded that only in relatively severe crashes would potential damage be a likely concern.

Laws on the books in California and Illinois require insurers to cover the cost of replacing child restraints used in crashes, regardless of crash severity. These laws aren't based on objective evidence about the subsequent performance of the restraints, and there's almost never any reason to replace a child restraint after a minor crash. Simply inspect it, and if there's no visible damage, its performance in future crashes shouldn't be affected. NHTSA's new policy reflects this.

*A child restraint that has been used in a crash meeting NHTSA's definition of a minor impact can be used again if there are no visible cracks or deformation in the restraint that might have been caused by the crash.*