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One of the participants in this week's car seat technician class, left, shows this driver what needs to be done to properly install a seat in his vehicle.

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Every year, children across the country are killed in vehicle accidents, and Amanda Horner believes many of those lives could be saved by simply safely buckling the kid into a car seat.

Horner is a traffic safety specialist with the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office, a division of the Kansas Department of Transportation, and she, along with area authorities, spent the last three days helping train local people on how to properly install car seats in a vehicle.

“We just had a class here in Liberal for people to be trained as Nationally Certified Car Seat Technicians,” she said. “They get certified with Safe Kids Worldwide. They are now what we call car seat experts.”

Horner said this means the people in the class can now provide education and information to the community about car seats.

“Anybody who has a car seat can ask them questions,” she said.



Thursday, class participants took part in the last step to becoming car seat technicians, a check lane in north Liberal where they actually got to help some families and children ride more safely.

Horner’s agency led the class, and she had some help from the Ford County Sheriff’s office and the Kansas Highway Patrol. As for who participated in the class itself, many of people from all over Liberal took the time to become a car seat technician.

“In the class, we have people from all sorts of places,” she said. “We have the Seward County Sheriff’s office. We have the Mexican American Ministries. We have Head Start. We have Seward County Health Department. Ulysses and Meade County are here as well.”

For many people, Horner said it is a surprise that a car seat class such as this one takes three days, but she said participants will learn all of the basic information needed to install any car seat in any vehicle.

“They learn all about how to install the car seat, what’s the best practice for children of any age and what seat they should be in,” she said. “There’s a lot of different options out there.”

KTRSO gives the car seat classes in many different areas of Kansas every year, and Horner said further education is provided away from the trainings.

“They have check lanes for the public to come and get their car seats checked pretty often,” she said.

To demonstrate the need for safe car seats, Horner explained that vehicle crashes are the number one killer of people age 4 to 34. She added about 75 percent of car seats are not installed correctly.

“When we’re talking about car crashes and children dying in car crashes, a lot of times, it’s because the car seat was not installed properly, not because the parent didn’t care,” she said. “They just didn’t know better. They didn’t know how to do it properly. The more people that we have in the community that are able to help and show parents how to install it properly, the more safe your children are going to be.”

Horner likewise explained that having kids tight in seat belts and making sure car seats are locked are also an important part of the class.

“Not everybody knows there’s different ways to lock that car seat,” she said. “You don’t just buckle the seat belt. You have to make sure it’s locked one way or another. Non-use is a big part. If you have a kid who’s actually not buckled up, they’re not safe.”

Horner added it is likewise important for adults to serve as a role model when it comes to buckling up.

“If the driver is not buckled, only 30 percent of children are buckled,” she said. “If the driver is buckled, 95 percent of children are restrained.”

Horner said thanks to this week’s class, the Liberal community now has more resources for parents when it comes to keeping their kids safe.

“If they want to know how to install their car seat properly, if they want to learn more information, they’re welcome to call the Seward County Health Department, the Kansas Children’s Service League,” she said. “They can even call my office in Topeka, and we can get them connected with a local person.”

That number is 1-800-416-2522, and the Web site for Horner’s agency is www.ktrso.org.

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