

Exploring the sale of second hand child restraints and booster seats in Victoria

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Abstract

RACV has a strong commitment to providing accurate and useful information to parents and carers regarding child restraint and booster seat safety. The use of second hand child restraints is generally not recommended because the restraint may have been in crash, be damaged, missing parts, or be too old to provide the best protection in a crash. However purchasing a new restraint may not be a realistic option for all families. The current project aimed to examine quality and safety of second hand child restraint and booster seats available in Victoria, and to also investigate their compliance with standards and regulations. A range of online, second hand specialist retailers, resource recovery centres, and markets were explored. Where available, the source, location, brand, model, price, year of manufacture and whether the current standard was met was noted. From these sale platforms, the details of 164 second hand restraints were obtained. Most results were acquired from online sellers (114 restraints) and of these, 16 (14%) were unsuitable for sale. Of the 50 restraints examined in stores, 18 (36%) were unsuitable for sale. Most restraints appeared to meet the current standard however restraints considered unsuitable for sale were found to be worn, damaged, too old or were identified as illegal overseas models. The issue of substandard restraints for sale could potentially be addressed by communicating to parents and vendors about the risks and precautions to take when selling and purchasing second hand child restraints.

Introduction

RACV provides advice on the purchase and use of child restraints and booster seats in Victoria. Only child restraints complying with the 2004, 2010 or 2013 versions of the Australian standard (AS/NZ 1754) can be legally sold and used in Victoria. In addition, only restraints less than 10 years old are recommended for use and restraints that are damaged or have been in a crash should not be used as they may not perform optimally in a crash. Booster cushions do not offer any side impact or head protection and are not recommended for use.

RACV sought to examine the second hand market for child restraints and booster seats to establish the safety and quality of restraints being sold in Victoria. The level of compliance with the standard and regulations was also investigated to ensure the safety of children is not compromised in a crash.

Method

A variety of sources of second hand restraints were explored to identify where potential problems are likely to exist and identify avenues for further action and investigation. The details of 164 second hand restraints were collected from a number of sources including online sales platforms (114 restraints), specialist baby goods second hand retailers (37 restraints), resource recovery centres (7 restraints), second hand and charity shops (0 restraints) and a baby goods second hand market (6 restraints). Second hand charity shops were found to not stock second hand child restraints most probably as a matter of policy.

Results

Overall, the results showed that 21% of restraints were unsuitable for sale. The quality of restraints varied between online and in store. Table 1 summarises the restraints that were examined online.

Table 1. Summary of restraints examined online

	Suitable	Unsuitable	Total
Online store 1	78	14	92
Online store 2	20	2	22
	98	16	114

Of the 114 restraints examined from online stores, 16 (14%) were found to be unsuitable. Of these, 7 were booster cushions, 5 were overseas models, 3 were damaged, and 1 was more than 10 years old.

Table 2 summarises the restraints that were examined in stores.

Table 2. Summary of restraints examined in stores

	Suitable	Unsuitable	Total
Second hand baby goods stores	23	14	37
Resource recovery centres	3	4	7
Baby good second hand market	6	-	6
Charity stores	-	-	-
	32	18	50

Of the 50 restraints examined, 18 (36%) were found to be unsuitable. Of these, 7 were more than 10 years old, 6 had the sticker removed or were worn out, 2 were damaged, 2 were overseas models and 1 was a booster cushion. If stickers displaying information about the year of manufacture and compliance with the Australian standard are removed, parents are not able to accurately determine the suitability of a restraint.

Key Findings

Online stores

There was generally more information about the child restraints available on one online site compared to the other. The listings on both websites tended to be for recent child restraint models, particularly in the capsule and forward facing categories, and therefore these are less likely to be a problem.

While most child restraints examined for sale for this study appeared to meet the standard, booster cushions (not recommended for use) were found for sale and some international restraints (illegal to use) were of concern. Some restraints were damaged and should not have been for sale.

Second hand stores

Many restraints at one store were old and visibly worn and several did not have dates of manufacture, which does not allow parents to make an informed purchase decision. A number had their dates scratched off or removed and one model seemed to have had a new cover put on, which aroused some suspicion about the prior condition of the restraint and the reason for the change.

Resource Recovery Centres

The quality of child restraints found at Resource Recovery Centres was poor and less than half would be suitable for purchase. This is not surprising as these restraints were most likely intended for disposal rather than sale.

Second hand market

All child restraints found at the baby market appeared to be of acceptable quality and met the Australian standard.

Discussion

There is a substantial volume of second hand child restraints for sale in Victoria, some of which were found to be illegal and/or unsafe to use, while many appeared to be suitable and safe to use. It is important for sellers to only sell legal and safe models of child restraints, and for parents to take steps to check they are buying a child restraint that meets the Australian standard and are safe to use.

The research recommended that advice could be offered to parents/buyers to assist in making an appropriate and safe purchase. To address this, RACV has developed a set of tips to help parents purchase a suitable restraint. Information for parents can be found at racv.com.au/childrestraints. This information was communicated through RACV's RoyalAuto magazine, a media release, and social media messaging.

It was identified that some restraints for sale needed to be removed urgently. Given the small number of sellers involved, it was suggested that government could work directly with retailers to ensure unsuitable restraints are not available for sale. On an ongoing basis, this could also involve communication regarding updates on standards and regulations about the types of restraints that can be sold. An expert contact could also be provided to support retailers in making decisions about restraints for sale.

Retailers also have an obligation to be familiar with legal and safety requirements and destroy any restraint that is identified as being unsuitable for sale. Retailers should only sell restraints that meet the Australian standards, are not damaged, in good condition and less than 10 years old. It is also important for buyers to be aware of what to check to ensure they are purchasing a safe restraint, so that the safety of their children is not compromised in the event of a crash. RACV's tips will assist parents and carers make an informed purchase decision and select a suitable and safe restraint for their child.

Reference

McIntyre, A. (2015). *Exploring Sales of Second Hand Child Restraints in Victoria*. Unpublished report.