passenger safety laws is another way to strengthen a state’s statute. In nearly half the states, the fine is $25 or less—an amount not likely to change a driver’s behavior. The serious implications of improperly restraining children in the vehicle justify the need for stiffer fines.

While strengthening state laws is an important and necessary first step to improving child-passenger safety, a change in behavior cannot be achieved if tough laws are not paired with enforcement and education. Police officers need to understand and enforce these laws with consistency, so the enactment of a new law must be accompanied by an outreach-and-education campaign geared toward parents and caregivers. Law enforcement should also be targeted with information because they often are confused by existing laws and, despite good intentions, may not properly enforce them.

Booster seats

Booster seats are designed to elevate a child so the shoulder belt fits properly across the collarbone and the lap belt across the pelvis. Research shows that poorly fitting adult belts can injure children and that booster seats help ensure proper adult-belt placement. Surprisingly, however, no federal standards exist for restraints for children who weigh more than 50 pounds. AAA is working with Congress to update federal motor-vehicle safety standards to provide specific guidelines regarding who should use booster seats, and performance specifications for manufacturers.

In addition, little is known regarding parameters to measure how long a child must remain in a booster seat. Is age the appropriate measurement, or is it weight or height? More research is quickly needed because states across the country are enacting booster-seat laws with varying age and weight requirements. Several new laws have left gaps in coverage, thus endangering children instead of protecting them. As a result, the message parents and caregivers about the importance of ensuring children are properly restrained when riding in a motor vehicle is crucial.

One way to make significant strides in improving child-passenger safety is to enact comprehensive laws that apply to all children in all seating positions until age 8 and under 80 pounds to be properly restrained in vehicles. It is a top priority to reduce the number of child fatalities and serious injuries to New Jersey’s young children through these initiatives designed to better protect them from harm when riding in vehicles.

What state and local officials are saying

Officer Bob Wall, Fairfax County, Virginia Police Department

Q. What elements are needed to ensure a child-passenger safety law is enforceable?

A. To ensure a law is enforceable it needs to be plain, straightforward, and simple. It needs to meet national guidelines (of child-passenger safety) and it needs to target an age range where the majority of children you are trying to reach fit. We have to be realistic in writing these laws … we can’t reach for the moon.

New Jersey Sen. John Matheussen

Q. What key elements does a child-passenger safety law need to ensure our children are safe on the roadways?

A. We are endeavoring to better protect the lives and health of young children in vehicles in New Jersey by enacting strong laws raising public awareness of the correct manner in which to restrain a child in a car seat, providing

What state grants to low- and moderate-income families for the purchase of the proper-care seats, and requiring children under the age of 8 and under 80 pounds to be properly restrained in vehicles. It is a top priority to reduce the number of child fatalities and serious injuries to New Jersey’s young children through these initiatives designed to better protect them from harm when riding in vehicles.

South Carolina Gov. Jim Hodges

Q. Why is it important to have primary enforcement for children?

A. Accidents on our roadways are the leading cause of accidental death for children in South Carolina. By requiring the use of seat belts and safety seats, we can reduce the number of fatal accidents involving our children and teens.

Most people do not realize that automobile crashes are the No. 1 killer of children in the United States and that many of these deaths could be prevented. Raising awareness and educating parents and caregivers about the importance of ensuring children are properly restrained when riding in a motor vehicle is crucial.

Raising awareness and educating parents and caregivers about the importance of ensuring children are properly restrained when riding in a motor vehicle is crucial.
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structures. The project will be completed in summer 2003 at a cost of $8 million, which was financed by the sale of university bonds and increased residence- hall rates.

Kentucky has not introduced legislation to mandate sprinklers in dorms.

New Jersey: Three killed

Three students died and 62 were injured in a highly publicized dorm fire at New Jersey’s Seton Hall University on Jan. 19, 2000. The fire inside six-story Boland Hall was deliberately set.

The New Jersey Legislature swiftly acted to prevent another tragedy in the state. The New Jersey Senate unanimously passed a bill (SB 891) requiring the state’s public and private colleges and universities to install sprinkler systems in all buildings used to house students. The legislation is unprecedented because it also applies to sorority and fraternity houses, as well as to boarding and military schools with dorms.

Then-Gov. Christine Todd Whitman signed the bill, the Dormitory Safety Trust Fund Act, at Seton Hall University six months after the tragedy. The act requires sprinkler installation to be completed in four years, but the deadline can be extended in certain cases. The act also established the Dormitory Safety Trust Fund, which provides loans to the schools to install the sprinkler systems.

Almost a year after the deadly fire, a fire started in a trash can in Boland Hall.

Fortunately, a sprinkler system had been installed. One sprinkler head activated and extinguished the fire without any reported injuries to the 600 residents.

Wisconsin: Zero killed

Wisconsin Rep. Rob Kreibich introduced sprinkler legislation in 1999 after talking with firefighters about the state’s dozen high-rise dorms. He was concerned that the dorms did not have sprinklers and that firefighters did not have the proper equipment to reach the upper stories should a fire occur.

“Why should we wait until students die before enacting legislation?” Kreibich said, speaking of Wisconsin’s proactive planning.

The bill (AB 203) was about to be defeated when the tragic fire occurred at Seton Hall in New Jersey. After legislators saw what could happen, the bill sailed through the Legislature.

The Wisconsin law requires all residence halls more than 60 feet tall in the state’s university system to have a sprinkler system on each floor before Jan. 1, 2006. The estimated cost of installing sprinklers in the dorms is $7.5 million, which will be spread over the six-year period and is covered by a reserve in auxiliary funds. All residence halls built after the law’s effective date must be fitted with an automatic sprinkler system on each floor during construction.

Kreibich said that installation has started in all the dorms, and he is confident full installation will be completed before the deadline. The Wisconsin law does not cover fraternity and sorority houses, but Kreibich said that later legislation may address those structures.

Table: State sprinkler legislation introduced in 2001

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<tbody>
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Source: Campus Firewatch, 2001

What next?

The tragedies in Kentucky and New Jersey have heightened awareness about campus fire safety. They prove that fire drills and smoke alarms are not always enough.

Following the lead of New Jersey and Wisconsin, at least five states introduced legislation to retrofit sprinklers in college housing this year.

In addition, Connecticut’s fire marshal and commissioner of higher education recommended that each public and private institution of higher education that houses students develop and implement a plan for sprinkler systems in residential facilities.

At the federal level, Sens. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and John Edwards of North Carolina introduced the College Fire Prevention Act (SB 399) in February 2001. The bill provides for sprinklers or other fire suppression or prevention equipment to be installed in all public and private college and university housing and dorms, including fraternity and sorority housing. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions is studying the bill.

Lisa R. Collins is a program associate with the National Association of State Facilities Administrators.

As legislatures in 19 states prepare for or adjust to term limits, they are changing their ways of conducting business.

BY DONALD R. HUNTER AND FRED J. VICKERS

Legislative term limits have had a turbulent history in the past decade. A prime example is the 1995 session of the California Assembly, which had three different speakers in the initial period of tur- moil that accompanied the transition to term limits after it was adopted by voters in 1990. Since then, 11 state legislatures have made their own transition, and term limits soon will take effect in eight more state legislatures.

Looking at CSG’s four regions, the 19 states with term limits include one of 10 states in the East (Maine), four of 11 states in the Midwest (Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio and South Dakota), five of 16 states in the South (Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri and Oklahoma) and nine of 13 states in the West (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming).

Heated battles over whether to enact term limits for state and federal lawmakers began to flare in the 1980s, when supporters saw term limits as a way to open seats held by powerful incumbents in a Congress under Democratic control for 40 years. Term-limit supporters gained voter approval in 1990 of initiatives in California, Colorado and Oklahoma and followed with initiative campaigns in states allowing them.

Term limits remain popular with voters but not with politicians. One recent CSG survey showed 76 percent of elected officials opposed term limits. Illustration by Susie Bush.