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## Tougher Back Seat Safety Standards Needed

***Rear seats in cars need to be improved to ensure the safety of passengers, the consumer rights group ANEC urged today as it published the results of its crash tests. The tests show that rear seats are rarely strong enough to fully withstand the force from luggage placed in the boot of a car that is thrown forward when the vehicle is involved in a frontal impact.***



Even when luggage is well below the maximum recommended by carmakers, it can knock the rear seats forward during a frontal impact, the tests reveal. And once the luggage is thrown forward, it can hit car passengers with lethal force, as sadly shown in accident reports. Flying luggage can even threaten occupants in front seats.

“These tests prove that the current standards are simply not enough to guarantee the safety of passengers in the back seats of an average vehicle,” said ANEC Secretary-General Gottlobe Fabisch. “Consumers have a right to expect the strength of the barrier between the luggage compartment and the passenger compartment to be strong enough to protect them from luggage. Unless basic safety requirements are fitted into new vehicles in Europe, passengers – and in particular children – will be exposed to an unnecessary risk in the event of a frontal-impact accident.”

The current European Union standards on rear seats are based automatically on those drafted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE). But the UN ECE Regulation 17 on rear seat strength testing is too weak to cope, the ANEC tests show.

ANEC tests were conducted using the mild UN ECE-R17 standard, and a more realistic specifications, as seen in the European New Car Assessment Program (EuroNCAP). EuroNCAP has already had major success in influencing other aspects of car safety, but although it has conducted frontal impact crashes, so far they have never included luggage simulation.

The crash tests for ANEC used cars with split foldable rear seats, and placed four small suitcases - weighing a total of 90kg - in the boot. Applying the EuroNCAP test specifications for frontal impact, which impacts the vehicles at 64km per hour, it was found the hinges holding the seats in place would be released or broken. The test illustrated situations in which the loading of the occupants was needlessly increased as the luggage forced the seat back forwards in the crash. In one test, the luggage itself broke into the passenger compartment, potentially threatening other occupants.

ANEC says the relevant UN and EU committees responsible for rear seat legislation should ensure that safety provisions are strengthened. And the EuroNCAP Assembly and Technical Working Group should consider how its influence could be used to improve this area of design.

As for carmakers, their rear seats should be designed with some reflection of the luggage capacity of the vehicle. And ANEC warns that until car manufacturers improve the strength of their rear seat backrests, consumers should try to limit their risks by:

- placing heavy luggage on the boot floor, as close as possible against the backrest;
- tying down luggage with strong ropes, using the fixing lugs in your car, to keep the luggage in place during an impact.
- closing seat belts when there are no rear passengers, as they may help to keep the backrest in place, thus protecting front occupants.

ANEC is the European Association for the co-ordination of consumer representation in standardisation. With more than 150 consumer experts and many consumer representatives attending the work of European standards committees, ANEC is also directly represented in the three European standards bodies (CEN, CENELEC and ETSI). ANEC is financed by the European Commission and EFTA.

The ANEC Traffic Safety Working Group tries to influence car safety standards from the consumer point of view. Over the years the group has successfully pushed for improved standards, including frontal and side impact regulations for passenger cars, and regulations governing seat belts and child restraints.

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