

July 12, 2010

Unattended Cars, Heat and Children: A Deadly Combination!

A recent incident in Albuquerque points out the dangers of leaving children unattended in cars. The incident involved a bus driver for a non-profit that provides low income child care to Albuquerque residents. The bus driver had made his rounds dropping off kids at their homes. He forgot about two toddlers, ages 7 months and 1 year old, who were lying quietly in their car seats. He finished his rounds, returned the van to Peanut Butter and Jelly Family Services, locked the doors and went home. Fortunately for all, the children suffered only dehydration and diaper rash. The outcome is often times far worse.

Anyone reading about the incident would be very unsympathetic to the bus driver. His negligence is unacceptable. Surprisingly, this behavior is not all that unusual. Many times, adults leave kids in vehicles for convenience. On occasion, as in this case, the behavior is accidental. About the same time the story arose in Albuquerque, several news outlets carried similar stories. CNN carried one that ended tragically. Basically, the mother and father of two young children changed their normal routine for dropping off the kids at daycare. A toddler was placed in the mom's car in the morning. The dad usually dropped the kids at daycare. As in the case of the Albuquerque bus driver, the toddler lied quietly in his cars seat. The mom in the trance of her daily routine went to work, worked all day, went to pick up her son at the daycare, only then to realize what had happened. The child died.

CNN reports during the same story that 37 children die each year as a result of being left in vehicles. There have already been 20 reported cases through June of this year. It is uncommon that a child would be left in a car all day as occurred in the CNN report. Instead, these tragedies typically happen very quickly. Hyperthermia (heat stroke) can occur rapidly in children in an unattended vehicle. An unattended car can have a temperature 40 degrees higher than the heat outside. In the intense sun of New Mexico, the variance can be much greater. Simple math says it all even in moderate weather. Children in particular are not equipped to endure such heat. Exposure to that kind of heat even briefly can be catastrophic.

Though, the incident with the Albuquerque bus driver ended far better than it might have, the driver is facing two counts of felony child abuse. He, the children, and their parents are lucky the charges are not more serious. More

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often than not, these incidents lead to death. There is simply no good reason for leaving a child unattended in a vehicle no matter what the circumstances.

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