

Wrecks Kill 21 Unrestrained Children In Seven Years

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — During the past seven years, 21 passengers younger than 14 died in South Dakota accidents after not being restrained in a car seat or safety belt, a newspaper's analysis of state accident records shows.

Nearly 100 unrestrained children were seriously injured during that period, according to the *Argus Leader* report published Sunday.

South Dakota has some of the least restrictive child-car safety laws and least severe punishments. The state does not require car seats or boosters for passengers older than 4.

Child safety advocates have been pushing for years to require booster seats for 5- to 8-year-olds in the state. The boosters replace the seats used for small children and elevate the body so seat belts are more effective.

"A lot of parents today did not grow up with the booster seat idea," said Melissa Fluckey, statewide training coordinator for the Department of Social Services. "I think it still is kind of a new concept, but parents are catching on."

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, in general, favors fewer regulations and would rather encourage parents to use proper car seats and boosters, his spokesman said.

"If you have parents who have the information and choose to ignore it, then you have to wonder if putting it into the law would really make that much difference or not," spokesman Tony Venhuizen said. "It's a philosophical question."

The newspaper's analysis also found that about 21 percent of children involved in accidents had no restraints or were not properly buckled between 2004 and 2010.

From 2004 to last year, a third of drivers involved in accidents who had unrestrained underage passengers did not receive any citations. And only a third of the drivers in accidents where an unrestrained child died received a citation.

Highway Patrol Superintendent Craig Price said citations are up to the officer's discretion.

"I think there is a lot of different circumstances that come into play," he said. "Sometimes the circumstances just don't warrant anything beyond a verbal or written warning."

Oacoma Residents Sandbag Against Rising Missouri River

OACOMA (AP) — The swollen Missouri River is climbing near Oacoma into areas usually immune from floodwaters.

Homeowners are scrambling to prepare for imminent flooding with the water rising more than six inches a day.

KELO television reports that three groups of volunteers this weekend were working simultaneously to build walls that reach four feet high.

USD grad Shane Bryan was teaching volunteers how to protect their homes. He had done some sandbagging in Yankton and helped a friend build a berm in Wynstone.

Bryan says it's mind blowing to see how fast the river is rising.

Seventy-five-year-old Iris Harmon had some 30 volunteers helping to protect her house on Main Street. She was told she would stay dry but wanted to take extra precautions.

Thune Calls Tour Of Fort Pierre 'Sobering'

FORT PIERRE (AP) — Sen. John Thune says seeing flood-stricken areas around Pierre and Fort Pierre firsthand really personalizes the disaster.

KCCR radio reports that Thune toured the evacuated Frontier Road area of Fort Pierre by boat on Saturday. The development area along the Missouri River is covered by several feet of flood water, affecting 15 out of the 20 homes.

Thune calls the scene "sobering."

He says it's important for people to understand that there were a lot of families and homes that weren't protected by levees.

Thune says he told the residents that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be asked to answer for their actions that led to the flood.

Minot Water Ebbs, Thoughts Turn To Recovery

BY DALE WETZEL AND JOHN FLESHER
Associated Press

MINOT, N.D. — The Souris River began a long, slow retreat in Minot on Sunday, leaving behind an arduous rebuilding job for more than 4,000 homeowners and hundreds of business operators, most of whom lack insurance to pay for it.

Because they don't have coverage, federal assistance could amount to as little as a few thousand dollars apiece. Loan and grant programs will provide some help, as will an emergency relief fund just being set up.

Still, there was at least one ray of hope: State lawmakers might be able to lend a hand, thanks in large part to North Dakota's oil boom, which generates \$1 billion a year in tax money and has helped shield the state from the worst of the recession.

Few people in Minot carried flood insurance — only 375 homes in the flooded areas, said John Ashton, a spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Mike and Jodi Picard checked with neighbors when moving into their house less than two years ago and found that just one had flood insurance. The river was a

quarter-mile away, and the prevailing opinion was that "we were not in a floodplain anymore" after a 1969 flood led to construction of levees and straightening of the river channel.

The Souris topped out Sunday nearly 2 feet below projections heading into the weekend, and it appeared damage might not extend beyond the homes and businesses that took on water Friday. Officials warned against overconfidence until the river fell enough to take the pressure off levees. The National Weather Service projected the river would decline 2 feet by mid-week.

The Picards stood on a bridge overlooking the swollen river, straining for a glimpse of their house in a distant cul-de-sac. It appeared water was knee-deep on the main floor.

The couple was staying with relatives in the area but said they were determined to return home. After the water recedes, they'll pump the basement dry, tear out drywall and insulation and make needed repairs.

State lawmakers will probably consider offering flood relief during a special session this fall. They have \$386 million in a rainy-day fund, as well as another \$136 million in

a school-aid fund that could be diverted to the many communities touched by floodwaters this year. Both funds are fattened by state oil revenues.

When it comes to paying for rebuilding, FEMA has approved individual assistance for Burleigh (home to the capital of Bismarck) and Ward counties, where Minot is located. Gov. Jack Dalrymple is pushing to expand it to 20 other counties and the Turtle Mountain Chippewa and Spirit Lake Sioux reservations.

"We know that we have a tremendous recovery effort coming, and even as we talk about how to beat this water back over the next few days, we have already started talking about how the recovery will be managed and organized," the governor said.

The FEMA assistance is capped at a little more than \$30,000, but Sen. Kent Conrad, a North Dakota Democrat, said a more realistic figure is \$7,000 to \$8,000 — the typical amounts provided to victims of severe flooding in Nashville, Tenn., a year ago.

FEMA and the federal Small Business Administration will offer loan and grant programs, too. The Bank of North Dakota, the nation's only state-owned bank, already offers low-interest loans up to \$500,000 to business people, farmers and ranchers liv-

ing in areas that the president has declared a disaster area.

The bank and the state's Public Finance Authority also have made low-interest loans available to local governments while they wait to collect expected federal aid after they make repairs on their public works.

Eric Hardmeyer, the Bank of North Dakota's president, said the bank learned valuable lessons about administering disaster aid from the epic Red River Valley floods of 1997, which swamped the city of Grand Forks, knocked out its sewer and water systems and forced the evacuation of more than 50,000 people.

"We found that we needed to let the federal programs get in and do their business before we found out where we should play," Hardmeyer said. "Their pockets are deeper, and they're more experienced at that than we are."

Pat Owens, who was mayor of Grand Forks when the flood hit in April 1997, said federal agencies were critical to the city's recovery.

"That was a salvation," Owens told The Associated Press in a telephone interview Sunday. "People would not know how to even begin trying to bring their lives back, and that gave them a place to go."

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