

**Government Announces New Child Seat Ratings System**  
**The Associated Press, Washington**  
January 30, Ken Thomas

Parents who struggle to install their child safety seats or fasten their toddlers in the back-seat chairs are receiving some new guidance from the government.

The Transportation Department said Wednesday it was revamping a consumer ratings system for child safety seats to help parents and caregivers make the best choice for their kids.

The new approach will use a five-star rating system, based on the seats' ability to secure a child and the ease with which the seats are installed. It will also consider the seats' labeling and instruction manuals.

"We believe that the new star system will help simplify one of parents' most important decisions: choosing the best safety seat that will protect their children," Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said during a news conference at an Arlington, Va., fire station.

Many parents can attest to the frequent frustration found in securing a car seat or making sure their child is strapped in. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said seven in ten child safety seats are either the wrong size or misused, reducing their ability to protect kids in a crash.

"If one of these things is difficult to use, even if someone buys one, they may not be willing to switch them among cars because they remember what a pain they were to install," said Adrian Lund, president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. "If we get seats that are easier to install, then it's more likely that people will use them."

When used properly, the seats are very effective. NHTSA estimates that child restraint systems reduce fatal injuries by 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers in passenger cars and by nearly 60 percent for infants and toddlers in sport utility vehicles, pickup trucks and vans.

Transportation officials stressed that the new ratings system does not assess how effective a seat is in protecting a child in a crash. All child seats must comply with federal safety standards to protect children in a car crash.

The government recommends car seats for children up to 40 pounds and booster seats for children over 40 pounds until they are 8 years old or 4 feet 9 inches tall. All children should ride in the back seat until age 13.

The new system, which assigns an overall rating of up to five stars, replaces an older ratings program which used letter grades. The five-star rating system is also used in NHTSA's consumer crash test program for new cars and trucks.

"This system is also a great resource for CPS Technicians," according to Ruth Harshfield, executive director of ACTS Oregon. "When a child under 5 pounds needs an infant seat, a 3 year old child is too tall for their convertible seats or a family wants a safety seat with a harness for their child over 40 pounds, the child seat rating lists harness type, weight and height limit for each seat."