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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Kicks off Public Education Campaign to Remind Parents of Dangers of Leaving Children Unattended

As a thermostat inside a car parked at the Quakerbridge Mall climbed, Gov. Christie Whitman today reminded parents of the many dangers of leaving children unattended in a car and unveiled a public awareness campaign to educate parents.

"At any time of the year, leaving children alone inside a car alone is dangerous. But in the hot summer months it is even more perilous - it can be deadly," the Governor said. "Parents should never leave their children alone in a car. Not even for a minute."

In addition to the concern that children can become dehydrated very quickly, the Governor said, leaving children alone also exposes them to being injured or abducted.

The Governor unveiled posters and window stickers which warn parents "NEVER leave children unattended in a car. Not even for a minute." They will be distributed statewide through Department of Human Services (DHS), the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect and the Council of American Automobile Association (AAA) Clubs of New Jersey.

Each year, DHS' Division of Youth and Family Services receives dozens of referrals of children being left unsupervised in an automobile.

"Deep down, most parents know they shouldn't leave children alone in a car, but they think they'll only be in a store just a few minutes, or they don't want to wake up their sleeping children," Gov. Whitman said. "In reality, any number of things can delay them from returning to the car as quickly as they thought. That time can be deadly for children."

The public awareness campaign will serve as reminder for parents, but also aims to raise the awareness of passers-by who may see young children left alone in a closed car. The Governor said such incidents should be reported immediately to security guards, police, or DYFS.

Groups or individuals who want copies of the posters or stickers can call the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect at 609-292-0888. Information about the public education campaign can be obtained from the Governor's website at www.state.nj.us.governor.