

Province ponders safety laws after Markham boy's death

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

The province is considering a law that would force motor vehicle manufacturers to create air bag disabling devices following the death of a Markham boy.

Nearly two months after eight-year-old Victor Cen died when an air bag went off in his father's minivan, cabinet ministers in the Mike Harris government are mulling over several ideas for legislation.

One idea would compel adults to place children in the back seats of cars or minivans and another would force the makers of most motor vehicles to create devices that can disable air bags, according to Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees.

"We are obviously concerned. It's not a matter that we are taking lightly," he said.

"There's general agreement that something should be done. I can assure you that Victor Cen and the circumstances surrounding his death have not been forgotten by us."

Cen died in mid-March after his father's minivan rear-ended a pickup truck at a low rate of speed in Toronto.

Studies show air bags go off with a force that resembles the



FRANK KLEES: Oak Ridges MPP supports new legislation on air bags.

impact of a 300 km/h crash and some York Regional Police officers say politicians should enact legislation that penalizes parents who seat children in the front of vehicles equipped with air bags.

Though they've saved thousands of lives, one report claims the devices have killed more than 250 children and small women in North America.

Klees, who supports air bag legislation and has raised the issue with a handful of cabinet colleagues including Transportation Minister Brad Clark,

stopped short of saying he's confident such legislation will pass.

"He appreciated me bringing it to his attention. He certainly didn't dismiss it out of hand," he said of Clark's reaction to the idea of an air bag law.

Klees noted his caucus could develop recommendations about air bags through a private member's bill but such proposed legislation rarely passes.

Moreover, Thornhill MPP Tina Molinari doubts whether any of her colleagues will draft a private member's bill.

"I have talked to a few of them about the issue. This is not one they were going to do," she said, adding she hasn't heard anything about such a bill going before the legislature.

Molinari, who is against compelling parents to place kids in back seats, said she would support air bag legislation only if it was comprehensive.

Right now, she added, she is not in a position to support such legislation because she's focusing on her own bill that is designed to improve safety for horseback riders.

Clark hopes to receive a report about air bags by the end of May.

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