

# Safety campaign hits stride

## Escondido woman using warning signs to save dogs, kids from hot cars

By [David Garrick](#) ([/staff/david-garrick/](#)) 5:45 p.m. May 6, 2015



Paola Potts holds one of her signs and her Chihuahua Guido. CHARLIE NEUMAN • U-T

ESCONDIDO — With summer’s warmer temperatures on the way, an Escondido woman is ramping up her countywide campaign to warn people about the dire consequences of leaving dogs and children inside parked cars.

From Lemon Grove to Oceanside to downtown San Diego, Paola Potts has persuaded local city governments and businesses to install more than 127 special warning signs since 2013.

And another 182 signs — including 90 the county government just agreed to place across the region — will be installed before the warmer temperatures kick in this summer, Potts said Wednesday.

“I’m trying to prevent the injury and death of children and pets,” said Potts, noting that temperatures inside a parked car increase more than 30 degrees within half an hour. “I’m trying to educate the public that is unaware of the dangers and the many deaths happening throughout the United States.”

An average of 37 children die each year nationwide from being trapped unattended inside a hot car, said Amber Rollins, director of the nonprofit [kidsandcars.org](#).

“These signs could be the one reminder that makes the difference between life and death,” Rollins said.

Statistics for dogs haven’t been compiled. But several states, including California, have passed laws making it a crime to leave a dog in a hot vehicle.

Last week, police issued a warning to a man who left a dog inside his car after taking his wife to the emergency room at UC San Diego. And in January, a woman was arrested in Escondido for leaving a toddler unattended inside her car.

Most of the warning signs are sponsored by private citizens recruited by Potts so cities and businesses can install them at no cost. But Oceanside officials decided the issue was important enough to spend about \$350 in city funds installing 17 signs last fall.

“She told us the kind of onerous exercise she’s had to go through in other places,” said Bryan Forward, an enforcement supervisor in Oceanside’s Public Works Department. “It seems like a no-brainer if someone comes to you with ready-made art and it’s an important issue. Despite all the news coverage, people continue to put dogs and children in danger.”

Things weren’t always so easy. Since Potts began her campaign, she’s had to form a nonprofit, design the signs, copyright them and navigate varying sign codes from city.

“It’s a tedious process,” said her husband, Jerry, a patent attorney who has helped her.

Potts said that’s part of the reason no one in other parts of the country have followed her model.

But she said it's been gratifying to see her campaign gain momentum.

Ace Parking installed 17 signs in downtown San Diego and Hillcrest lots in 2013 and is installing another eight this spring in La Jolla and Pacific Beach.

Westfield North County mall in Escondido is installing four signs this week.

The city of Escondido installed 64 signs two years ago and is installing another 67 this spring.

Poway recently agreed 25 signs this spring. And the county will install before the end of summer 90 signs, including 33 at library branches and three at county animal shelters, a spokesman said.

For details about the campaign, visit [solnair.org](http://solnair.org).

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