

Flying Laptop Kills Woman

April 20, 2009

By *Jennifer Anderson*

Copyright © 2009, [Ergoweb](#). Used by permission.

A laptop computer killed its owner in March, according to a Royal Canadian Mounted Police spokesman on April 16. Heather Storey's laptop was sitting unsecured in the back seat, and the vehicle's abrupt stop sent the computer flying into the back of her head. Commenting on the accident, ergonomist Peter Budnick, Ph.D.,CPE, the Principal of Ergoweb, Inc., said the accident lends itself to a discussion about the proper storage and transport of notebooks for mobile workers who have to lug them back and forth for work.

Storey, of Surrey, B.C., was driving to work when her vehicle was hit by a tow truck. The force of the blow to her head was so severe that it shattered the computer's screen and bent the frame. The coroner determined in April that she died as a result of blunt force trauma.

This appears to be the only flying laptop fatality, yet the risk of death and injury is significant. Dr. Budnick recommends "a good carry case or roller case that can also hold an external keyboard, mouse, and notebook stand" for notebook computers, and ergonomics and safety are served when the restraint issue is considered as carefully as the design of the bag.

While laptop owners in transit by car usually place their machine in a case of the kind recommended by Dr. Budnick, that bag is usually unsecured on the floor or on a seat when the vehicle is moving.

Airlines provide overhead lockers for safely stowing items that could become deadly missiles during sudden turbulence, but few laptop-using passengers choose to use them when they plan to work on their machine during the flight. They work with the unsecured machine perched on the food tray or on their lap. The Surrey fatality could prompt a second look at this common practice.

It could also give the laptop accessory market a boost. Some manufacturers have anticipated the potential for flying computers. There are various models of automobile "desks," securely-mounted platforms that hold the computer securely. Some designs fit in the passenger seat, held safely in place with the seat belt when the vehicle is moving.