

Delay denied for auto recall database; launch set for August

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2008 Chevrolet Cobalt SS Coupe.

Washington — Car, truck and motorcycle owners and used vehicle shoppers soon will be able to submit VIN numbers online at a government website — and at the sites of all major automakers — to find out immediately if vehicles have any unrepaired recalls.

The program, which starts Aug. 20 over the objections of automakers, may help owners of vehicles like newer Ford

Escapes, newer Chevrolet Malibus and older Jeep Grand Cherokees, which all have had multiple recalls. Owners may not be sure if all the fixes have been completed.

It also could benefit those considering a used car to determine if it has outstanding recalls.

The government website address is safercar.gov.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said Monday it would move forward with new rules it first announced in August 2013 that will require all major automakers and motorcycle manufacturers to provide owners with online access to recall information on vehicles searchable by VIN, or vehicle identification number. The VIN is essentially the serial number of the car; it's that long series of numbers and letters on a plate on the dashboard that can be seen through the windshield.

The agency's enforcement chief said in a Federal Register notice Monday that the agency had rejected a bid by the two major auto trade groups, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and the Association of Global Automakers, to delay the effective date of the rules by several months.

"Neither presents any details as to why it would take manufacturers with existing recall look-up tools longer than the year provided by the agency," NHTSA's associate administrator for enforcement, Nancy L. Lewis, wrote in the notice, saying many automakers are actively working on testing the system.

On Monday, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which represents Detroit's Big Three automakers, Toyota Motor Corp., Volkswagen AG and others, praised the government's efforts even if they didn't agree on every detail.

"We've been supportive of this because we all want speedy repair of recalled vehicles, and greater consumer awareness can help increase recall completion rates," spokesman Wade

Newton said. "Having NHTSA link to our websites is not only effective, it also saves duplication of efforts by government and manufacturers, since so many automakers already providing safety recall information on their own sites."

The search feature is required to be available at automakers' websites and at the government's safercar.gov website. The rules apply to automakers that sell at least 25,000 vehicles a year, and motorcycle manufacturers that sell at least 5,000.

The rules were required by Congress in 2012 and **the agency was supposed to have the system up and running by July 2013.**

"Owners and potential buyers alike will soon be able to identify whether a safety recall for their specific vehicle is incomplete, using our free online search at safercar.gov," Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said in announcing the new program last year.

Despite opposition from automakers, they will have to disclose the date of the recall when owners search by their VIN. Only about 75 percent of vehicles recalled get repaired on average.

Automakers will be required to supply VIN information electronically on their websites and transmit those numbers to NHTSA's servers starting Aug. 20. They must update websites at least weekly. NHTSA had initially proposed it be updated at least daily.

Many automakers, including Chrysler Group LLC, General Motors Co., BMW AG and Ford Motor Co., currently allow owners to type VIN numbers into a corporate site to determine if their vehicles are subject to recalls, NHTSA said.

The manufacturers must make information available on uncompleted recalls for at least 15 years from the date they first provided the list of recalled cars to dealers.

NHTSA initially wanted automakers to submit VIN numbers for all recalled vehicles to the government's website, but automakers complained it was too costly and burdensome. Under the system that goes into effect Aug. 20, when someone requests information at safercar.gov, that request will be routed to automakers' databases.

Under the new rules, automakers also will be required to provide vehicle owners with direct notice of recalls within 60 days of notifying NHTSA that a recall is occurring. The new rules also require bolder warnings on recall letters sent to owners.

The announcement comes amid new scrutiny of recalls after GM's record-setting 29 million vehicles recalled nationwide this year.

Automakers have recalled an unprecedented 40 million vehicles in the United States this year, far above the 30.8 million previous benchmark set in 2004. GM in May paid a record \$35 million fine for delaying a recall of 2.6 million vehicles linked to at least 13 deaths and 54 crashes.

The agency's acting chief, David Friedman, said in an interview this month that "the administration has clearly been taking a much more aggressive approach when it comes to holding automakers accountable."