



Automotive News

GM discloses more ignition-related deaths in U.S. report

Nick Bunkley  

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General Motors' most recent quarterly report to federal safety regulators on crashes that may be linked to a defect lists 47 deaths and 614 injuries in vehicles it has recalled this year for ignition problems.

Overall, GM reported 975 crashes resulting in 69 deaths and 1,101 injuries -- more than all other automakers combined. Most of the crashes occurred in the last several years, though a few date back as far as 2005.

The report lists 26 deaths and 302 injuries in Chevrolet Cobalts, seven deaths and 56 injuries in Saturn Ions, and five deaths and 122 injuries in Chevrolet HHRs. Those vehicles are among the 2.6 million small cars covered by GM's February ignition switch recall, which the company now admits should have happened years ago.

Four of those deaths occurred after the recall was announced, though it's unclear whether the ignition defect played a role. Two are attributed to an "electrical" problem and two list the issue as "unknown."

Automakers are required to file quarterly submissions under the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's "Early Warning Reporting" program, which was created after the recall involving deadly Firestone tires on Ford Motor Co. vehicles more than a decade ago. The reports are to include crashes in which a claimant alleges a possible defect or that the automaker believes a defect might be to blame.

The inclusion of the crashes in the report does not mean GM or anyone else has conclusively linked them to a defect.

Many of the crashes in GM's second-quarter report, which NHTSA recently posted on its website, likely relate to lawsuits filed after the first ignition recall in February. A GM spokesman declined to comment on the data.

GM has established a fund to compensate people injured and the families of those killed in crashes linked to the February ignition switch recall. The fund, administered by disaster payout expert Kenneth Feinberg, has received claims for 202 deaths and 1,851 injuries, as of last Friday. Feinberg and his staff have approved 32 death claims and 35 injury claims.

The minimum payout for death claims is \$1 million, plus additional money for a victim's spouse, children and lost wages.

The New York Times on Monday identified an 81-year-old Connecticut widow, Jean Averill, as the first of 13 fatalities that GM had internally linked to the defect. Averill died when her 2004 Saturn Ion crashed in December 2003, and her insurance company made a claim against GM the following month, according to the internal report that GM commissioned this year from former prosecutor Anton Valukas.

GM denied the claim, and the family said it didn't know it would likely be eligible for compensation until

contacted by the *Times*. Averill's name was blacked out in the version of the Valukas report that was publicly released.

Automotive News previously identified the other 12 fatalities that GM had linked to the defect. At least four of those 12 are among the 32 death claims approved by the Feinberg fund, which is accepting claims until Dec. 31.

Only two other automakers listed more than 100 crashes in their second-quarter Early Warning Reporting submissions: Ford Motor Co., which tallied eight deaths in 135 crashes, and Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A., which cited seven deaths in 510 crashes.

Most of the Toyota claims cite problems with the vehicle's "speed control" or brakes, indicating that they may be linked to its unintended-acceleration recalls in 2009 and 2010.

Meanwhile, Chrysler Group reported nine deaths in 42 crashes, Nissan North America reported four deaths in 24 crashes and American Honda reported one death in just 12 crashes.

The Chevrolet Cobalt alone accounted for 289 -- 30 percent -- of the 975 crashes GM reported.

Two U.S. senators, Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Ed Markey, D-Mass., in March introduced a bill that would make more information from Early Warning Reporting submissions publicly accessible. NHTSA officials can request more details about specific crashes listed in the reports, but it did not do so in a number of the crashes now linked to the ignition defect.

Early Warnings

Automakers are required to file quarterly reports with U.S. safety regulators listing crashes that are alleged or believed to be defect-related. Below are reports from automakers for the three months ended June 30, 2014. The inclusion of the crashes in the report does not mean the automaker or anyone else has conclusively linked them to a defect.

	Claims	Deaths	Injuries
GM	975	69	1,101
Toyota	510	7	637
Ford	135	8	157
Chrysler	42	9	46
Hyundai	28	4	28
Nissan	24	4	29
Kia	20	2	24
VW	16	0	20
Honda	12	1	17

Source: NHTSA



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