



Automotive News

Honda ordered to deliver airbag documents to NHTSA

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DETROIT (Reuters) -- U.S. safety regulators today ordered Honda Motor Co. to provide documents and answer questions under oath related to the government's ongoing probe of potentially defective air bags installed in millions of recalled U.S. vehicles.

The airbags were made by Japanese supplier Takata Corp., which received a similar order last Thursday from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

NHTSA is seeking all internal Honda communications related to Takata airbag inflators, as well any field reports, warranty claims and pre-suit legal claims, incidents and lawsuits related to the issue.

NHTSA also is asking Honda whether it sent any employees to visit Takata plants in the United States or Mexico starting in 2000.

Honda was ordered to deliver the documents by December 15.

NHTSA Chief Counsel Kevin Vincent issued an earlier special order on Monday to Honda, as part of an investigation to determine whether the automaker failed to fully report accident-related deaths and injuries as required by U.S. law.

"Honda has had regular communications with the NHTSA regarding the issues addressed in the special order, and we will continue to cooperate," the company said in an email statement.

Takata spokesman Alby Berman said the company "will continue to fully cooperate with the government investigation."

Since 2008, 10 global vehicle manufacturers that use Takata airbags have recalled more than 11 million cars in the United States and more than 17 million worldwide to replace inflators linked to at least four deaths and numerous serious injuries.

Honda has recalled nearly 7.6 million cars in the United States since 2008 because of the defective inflators, and more than 9.5 million cars globally.

One safety advocate said NHTSA's order was a must given Honda's prominence in the various cases involving the potentially defective airbags.

"Honda had the first known Takata airbag inflator explosion in 2004 and has all four known deaths linked to Takata airbags," Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, said in an email. Honda reported an unusual airbag deployment to Takata in 2004, but did not report it to the NHTSA until September 2009.



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