

# NHTSA urges GM owners to get ignition switch repairs

David Shepardson and Melissa Burden, The Detroit News 9:59 a.m. EST December 2, 2014



(Photo: AP)

Washington — The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on Tuesday urged owners of nearly 1 million General Motors vehicles recalled for ignition switch problems to get them fixed immediately.

The auto safety agency said in a consumer advisory that GM says there are enough parts available to fix all the faulty ignition switches "NHTSA urges owners of unrepaired GM vehicles to immediately contact their local dealer to arrange a service appointment. GM reports that many dealers will help owners get their vehicles remedied after work and on the weekends," NHTSA said.

To date, GM has repaired nearly 60 percent of the affected vehicle population covered under the recall, but many others remain.

"NHTSA will continue to push the automaker to keep up the momentum and get the remaining vehicles fixed promptly," the agency said.

The vehicles covered are all 2003-07 Saturn Ion, 2005-10 Chevrolet Cobalt, 2006-11 Chevrolet HHR, 2007-10 Pontiac G5, 2006-10 Pontiac Solstice and 2007-10 Saturn Sky. Owners can confirm whether their individual vehicle needs to be repaired by using NHTSA's [VIN look-up tool on safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov/vinlookup) (<http://www.safercar.gov/vinlookup>).

"Vehicle owners should contact their local dealers immediately to schedule an appointment to get the final remedy. Until the affected vehicle is fixed, owners should follow all of the interim safety steps advised by GM and keep in mind that the use of a single key is not a long term solution to the this serious safety problem," GM said.

GM ramped up its production of replacement ignition switches in order to complete production of replacement parts ahead of its original goal of early November. NHTSA also pushed the automaker to take steps to maximize the number of vehicle owners who bring in their vehicles for repair, including targeted outreach to non-English speakers, maintaining up-to-date information on its website and a combination of traditional and social media outreach, financial or other incentives, phone calls, and other approaches.

On Monday, GM's compensation fund said another death claim for those killed or injured as a result of defective ignition switches. That raises to 36 the number of deaths linked to the delayed recall of 2.6 million GM cars.

No additional injury claims were approved in the past 10 days, keeping the total findings for injuries at 44, including five very serious injury claims. In the holiday-shortened week, just 45 new claims were submitted, including four new death claims. GM initially said 13 deaths were linked to the problem.

GM adviser Ken Feinberg said as of Monday that 2,215 claims have been submitted — including 229 death claims and 142 for very serious injuries — and 1,081 have no documentation. Of the 229 death claims, 33 have been ruled ineligible, 74 deficient and 51 without documentation. Another 35 are currently under review. Overall, Feinberg has ruled 216 ineligible and says 463 are currently deficient. Another 375 are under review.

In May, GM paid a record-setting \$35 million fine to NHTSA for the delayed ignition switch recall, and agreed to up to three years of monitoring. The delayed recall has prompted investigations from the Justice Department, Congress, 48 state attorneys general, the Securities and Exchange Commission and U.S. and Canadian regulators.

GM has said it expects to spend \$400 million on claims, but has said they could rise as high as \$600 million.

Last month, Feinberg recommended and GM agreed to extend the deadline by 30 days until Jan. 31 — a month later than planned — as GM sent 850,000 letters to newly registered owners and others notifying them of the program. GM established the fund to provide compensation of those hurt or killed in the 2.59 million now-recalled Chevrolet Cobalts, Saturn Ions and other small cars with defective ignition switches that can inadvertently turn the engine off and disable power steering and air bags.

GM says as of Nov. 24, GM dealers have repaired 1.36 million ignition switches globally out of 2.36 million the automaker believes are still in use, or 57.8 percent. That 2.36 million figure is down from the 2.59 million older Chevrolet Cobalts, Saturn Ions and other small cars it initially sought in recalls in February and March.

"The difference between the 2.59 million produced and recalled, and the populations being sought is made up for by scrapped vehicles or vehicles no longer traceable by registration," GM spokesman Alan Adler said in an email.

In the U.S., GM scaled back the number of vehicles with the ignition switch defect it is looking for by about 10.4 percent to 1.96 million from about 2.19 million. GM says dealers have repaired 1.14 million or 58.1 percent, leaving about 823,000 vehicles in the U.S. to be repaired.

Vehicles with the faulty ignition switches can slip out of the "run" position while driving, disabling power steering, power brakes and air bags. In the aftermath, GM fired 15 people and has revised its safety organization.

GM executives have repeatedly said they want a 100 percent response rate to the ignition switch recall. Regulators say about 1 in 4 recalled vehicles are typically left unrepaired — and the figures are usually higher for older vehicles. Many of the cars recalled are more than 10 years old and could have had numerous owners.

Jeff Boyer, GM's vice president of global vehicle safety, said in an interview late last month that GM is committed to meeting that goal.

"We want to get every customer's vehicles repaired," Boyer said. "And we're going to be steadfast in our efforts to work quickly on doing that."

The company has turned to social media, newspaper advertisements and specific outreach to Hispanic communities to help find customers.

GM is offering \$25 gift cards to 705,000 owners of certain cars recalled for the ignition switch defect who have not ordered parts or contacted a dealer to get their vehicles fixed. The promotion, in which GM is sending notices directly to owners, runs through Jan. 1. It does not apply to owners of vehicles who already took their cars in to get fixed.

Boyer said GM continues to reach out to vehicle owners in several ways to encourage them to fix their cars. GM's supplier Delphi Automotive has completed service kits needed to repair all vehicles.

"We're understanding who those customers are in terms of demographics ... it may be families with kids, it may be young adults or older drivers, to segment and understand the populations in those terms and then define specific outreach strategies of what is the best way to contact those particular segments of our customers," Boyer said.

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# Takata rejects U.S. call for nationwide air bag recall

David Shepardson, The Detroit News 10:27 p.m. EST December 2, 2014



(Photo: Kazuhiro Nogi / Getty Images)

Washington — Embattled air bag manufacturer Takata Corp. told the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on Wednesday it will not agree to a nationwide recall of millions of vehicles for driver-side air bags, a move that could prompt the government to go to court to force a recall.

"NHTSA has received Takata's disappointing response to our demand for a national recall of certain driver's side air bags," said NHTSA Deputy Administrator David Friedman in a statement. "Takata shares responsibility for keeping drivers safe and we believe anything short of a national recall does not live up to that responsibility. We will review Takata's response in full to determine next steps."

NHTSA said the inflators pose an unreasonable risk of death or serious injury because they may shoot metal fragments at drivers and passengers. Since 2013, 10 automakers have recalled 7.8 million vehicles in the United States for Takata air bags that are linked to at least four deaths and 30 injuries in Hondas, mostly in high-humidity areas.

Takata chairman and CEO Shigehisa Takada said in a statement early Wednesday that it will continue to work with NHTSA. "Takata remains committed to cooperating closely with our customers and NHTSA to address the potential for inflator rupturing. We will take all actions needed to advance the goal of safety for the driving public, including working to produce additional replacement units to support any further recalls that may be announced by our customers," he said.

Last Wednesday, NHTSA formally demanded the Japanese auto supplier declare that millions of vehicles sold with driver-side air bags nationwide are defective, the first step toward forcing the company to recall the vehicles. NHTSA hasn't sought a nationwide recall of passenger side air bags.

Now that Takata has refused, the next step will be for NHTSA to issue an initial decision demanding a recall and to schedule a public hearing, where it could hear graphic testimony from people injured in exploding air bags. If Takata refuses following the hearing, the agency would have to go to court to enforce the recall demand.

Last week, NHTSA warned it may begin proceedings to start fining Takata up to \$7,000 per day per violation if it doesn't agree to recall the air bags.

Last month, NHTSA asked Takata and five automakers — Honda Motor Co., Ford Motor Co., Chrysler Group LLC, Mazda Motor Co. and BMW AG — to issue nationwide recalls for millions of vehicles with driver-side air bags. None have agreed to do so.

Takata will tell Congress on Wednesday it is creating an independent panel to review concerns about quality at its manufacturing plants -- and is certain to face questions about its refusal.

The announcement comes as Toyota Motor Corp. will tell a House Energy and Commerce panel it wants new assurances that air bag supplier Takata Corp. is producing quality parts. It's the most significant criticism of Takata by any automaker to date.

"Like you, we want additional assurances about the integrity and quality of Takata's manufacturing processes, particularly in light of previous experiences. For instance, in 2010 Toyota had to recall certain Takata inflators in Japan to address a different manufacturing problem not involving U.S. vehicles," said testimony by Abbas Saadat, a vice president at Toyota North America and a regional product safety executive, that was released by the committee Tuesday.

Takata defends its quality practices in its testimony, despite questions raised about procedures at a Mexican plant and leaked emails that raise questions about whether executives put maintaining production ahead of safety.

"We have confidence in the integrity of our engineering and our current manufacturing processes," says written testimony by Takata senior vice president for global quality Hiroshi Shimizu. "Takata is forming an independent quality assurance panel to audit and prepare an independent report regarding our current manufacturing procedures for best practices in the production of safe inflators, including inflator propellant. Upon completion, the report produced by this independent quality assurance panel will be made public."

Takata CEO Shigehisa Takada said in a statement the review will be chaired by former White House Chief of Staff and Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner.

Takata has also named former Transportation secretaries Rodney Slater and Norman Y. Mineta to serve as special counsels. "They will advise the company as we address the current challenges we face," he said.