

Honda Plans to Expand Recall of Driver-Side Takata Air Bags

Car Maker Talking With Other Air Bag Suppliers About Adding Production



Takata's global quality chief Hiroshi Shimizu, left, listens to Honda executive Rick Schostek, right, during testimony before a House panel hearing on Wednesday about the recall of Takata driver's side air bags. *REUTERS*

By **CHRISTINA ROGERS**

 **3 COMMENTS**

Updated Dec. 3, 2014 4:08 p.m. ET

Honda Motor Co. will expand its U.S. recall of **Takata** Corp. driver's side air bags to all 50 states and is in discussion with other air bag suppliers about adding production of replacement parts, an executive told lawmakers on Wednesday.

The auto maker agreed to act after Takata on Tuesday rejected the U.S. auto-safety regulator's call to broaden its repair campaign beyond a few southern states and U.S. territories, said Rick Schostek, an executive vice president with

Honda North America.

In the U.S., around 10 million vehicles with Takata-made air bags have been recalled over the past six years, mostly by Honda. The inflators are at risk of exploding with too much force during a crash and releasing metal shrapnel into the vehicle, a problem that is linked to five deaths in Hondas.

U.S. regulators have called on four other auto makers— [Ford Motor Co.](#) , [BMW AG](#) , [Mazda Motor Corp.](#) and Chrysler Group LLC—to expand their driver-side air bag repair campaigns but none have done so. Their repair campaigns have been limited to Florida, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“We believe our customers have concerns, and we want to satisfy our customers,” Mr. Schostek told a House panel hearing.

RELATED

- [NHTSA Nominee Pledges Tough Safety Approach](#)

With the expanded recall, Honda aims to gather more information about the air bags' condition outside the high-humidity regions where air bag ruptures initially were reported, he said.

Honda also has been in talks with Takata rivals [AutoLiv Inc.](#) and [Daicel Corp.](#) to add production of replacement parts to complete the needed fixes. Honda had previously limited recall repairs to 13 U.S. states and territories.

While Takata also is adding production to speed more replacement kits to dealers, Mr. Schostek said a parts shortage would exist for some time.

Officials with Takata, Honda and auto-safety regulator National Highway Traffic Safety Administration faced a second congressional hearing on Wednesday on a series of air-bag ruptures. Since 2008, 10 auto makers including Honda, [Toyota Motor Corp.](#) and BMW have recalled about 17 million vehicles globally to replace faulty air-bag inflators.

Find Out If Your Car Has Been Recalled



However, a new air bag-explosion problem emerged this summer that Takata suspects is linked to long-term exposure to high humidity and temperatures but has yet to pinpoint an exact cause.

While Takata and its customers issued a patchwork of regional recalls, U.S. regulators have criticized the efforts as insufficient and last month called on

them to expand recalls on certain driver's side air bags nationwide, after learning of two new ruptures in California and North Carolina, two states not included in the regional recalls.

"The evidence is the problem isn't limited to areas of absolute, high-humidity," David Friedman, NHTSA's deputy administrator, told the House panel. "A regional recall is no longer appropriate for the driver's side air bags."

Takata, in refusing the agency's request, could face fines of up to \$7,000 a day per vehicle. NHTSA in a statement said it is still reviewing Takata's response to determine what steps to take next.

On Tuesday, Takata laid out its case for resisting a NHTSA's recall demand in a letter to the agency arguing current data doesn't support the need for a broader repair campaign or identify a safety defect.

Takata's letter also challenged NHTSA's authority to compel a parts supplier to initiate a recall, saying its legal power is limited to only car makers and manufacturers of replacement parts.

The company said if it were to expand the latest recall, it would have to add another eight million vehicles to its recall-repair efforts, potentially diverting supplies of replacement kits from the high-humidity regions most at risk for air bag ruptures.

"The data still supports that we should remain focused on the regions with high temperature and humidity," said Hiroshi Shimizu, Takata's global quality chief, during the House hearing. "If a vehicle is registered outside the area, we consider it safe."

Takata said it is investigating the air bag rupture in North Carolina but hasn't had the chance to examine the inflator to determine whether its linked to the other recalls.

The air bag explosion in California involved a 2005 Honda Accord, a model

already covered by the auto maker's regional recall campaign, it said.

Mr. Friedman said the agency will use its regulatory powers to compel Takata and four auto makers to expand their driver's side air bag recalls. The agency also plans to hire its own air bag propellant expert to assist with testing as it investigates whether there is a need to expand recalls for certain passenger-side Takata air bags, Mr. Friedman said.

Honda and Toyota have called on the auto industry to establish a joint-initiative to independently test the problematic air bags.

On Wednesday, BMW North America Vice President Craig Westbrook said it is also looking to enlist outside engineering expertise to help it get a handle on the air bag defect.

Toyota said its Takata air bag problems only pertain to those on the passenger-side.

"One of the most frustrating parts about this is that neither Takata, nor the auto makers, have been able to get to the bottom of the root cause of this," Mr. Friedman said. Legally, they're responsible to do so, he added.

Write to Christina Rogers at christina.rogers@wsj.com