

Mother Of Victim: More Killed By GM Ignition Switch Defect

APRIL 01, 2014 6:13 PM ET

SCOTT NEUMAN



Laura Christian, far right, talks about how her birth daughter Amber Marie Rose was killed on July 29, 2005, in a car crash that investigators determined was linked to a defective ignition switch.

J. Scott Applewhite/AP

The birth mother of Amber Marie Rose, the teen whose 2005 death was the first linked to an ignition switch problem that's triggered a massive recall of General Motors vehicles, says that through a Facebook group for families of victims, she's identified at least 29 fatalities due to the defect. GM only acknowledges 13 deaths.

"I found 29 so far myself," Laura Christian tells *All Things Considered*. She said she's determined the additional fatalities using crash data, police reports or eyewitnesses [who reported] the airbags did not deploy."

GM has announced the recall of 2.6 million vehicles to search for the faulty ignition

switches.

Christian was reunited with Amber, her biological daughter, a year before the girl's fatal accident at age 16.

Amber's accident was attributed to a faulty ignition switch in her Chevrolet Cobalt, which apparently shut off the engine while the car was in motion – cutting power to the air bags, which didn't inflate when the car hit a tree in Dentsville, Md.

But alcohol and excessive speed were also cited as factors in the crash, although Christian insists she's "very confident" that her daughter would have survived if airbags had deployed as designed.

"I spoke to the EMTs shortly after [the accident] and they told me that had the airbags deployed that she would have been injured, but she would have been alive today," she tells ATC host Robert Siegel.

Christian believes that Congress should increase the maximum of \$35 million penalty for delaying the reporting of potentially life-threatening problems.

"That may sound like a lot to us as individuals, but to a corporation like GM, who made over \$3 billion last year, that's nothing. It's hardly a deterrent," she says.

She also wants passage of a bill sponsored by Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey and Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal to require earlier reporting of defects to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, or NHTSA.

"It shouldn't come to a fatality, especially when it's coming from a car that has a defective part," Christian says. "GM knew about this defect, they knew about it in 2001, they OK'd it going forward. They should have been required to pass on that information to the NHTSA from day one."

In testimony on Capitol Hill on Tuesday, GM CEO Mary Barra expressed "sincere apologies to everyone who has been affected by this recall ... especially to the families and friends of those who lost their lives or were injured."

"I cannot tell you why it took years for a safety defect to be announced," Barra said in her opening testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "I can tell you that we will find out."

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