

# Jeep Cherokee catches fire 2 days after purchase; NHTSA opens probe

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WASHINGTON -- A 2015 Jeep Cherokee that erupted in flames two days after purchase has prompted the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to investigate whether a defect exists in 50,415 of the SUVs.

NHTSA investigators are looking into the cause of the incident as well as the frequency and scope of the potential problem. NHTSA's Office of Defect Investigations has also received early-warning report data related to the alleged defect, according to investigation's opening document posted on NHTSA's website.

After purchasing the Cherokee on Jan. 2, the owner on Jan. 4 noticed an oily smell while driving, according to a complaint posted on NHTSA's website. White smoke seeped from the hood after the driver parked the SUV and "within seconds the entire car was engulfed in fire, flames 20 feet high," the complaint said.

A 50-yard trail of burning oil or fuel ran down the street following the fire, which totaled the Cherokee with only 100 miles on the odometer, the complaint said.

"We are aware of this incident and our investigators are cooperating fully with NHTSA's Preliminary Evaluation," said Chrysler spokesman Eric Mayne in an email.

A second complaint related to the investigation said an owner noticed white smoke under the hood of the owner's 2015 Cherokee, which had logged just 45 miles at the time of the incident.

Neither incident resulted in injury or death, according to NHTSA. There were no reports of fires for 2014 models.

Jeep sold 178,508 Cherokees in 2014, its first full year on the U.S. market, according to the Automotive News data center.

The safety administration begins a "preliminary evaluation" in the event of customer complaints or manufacturer service bulletins that suggest the possibility of a safety-related defect. Once the evaluation is complete, the agency either begins an engineering analysis or closes the inquiry. Based on the outcome of an engineering analysis, a vehicle may be recalled or the inquiry may be closed with no further action.