



GM ignition switch deaths hit 100

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(Photo: Patrick Smith, for USA TODAY)

DETROIT — The number of deaths caused by General Motors' defective ignition switches increased by three to 100 last week, according to a weekly update from the fund created to compensate victims.

The GM Ignition Compensation Fund, led by Ken Feinberg, has 626 applications yet to review out of the 4,342 that were submitted between last August and Jan. 31. About 72% of those applications have been deemed ineligible for any compensation.

The fund staff has found 12 cases where people suffered lost limbs or suffered brain damage or pervasive burns in crashes that were primarily caused by the defective ignition switches. They are eligible for significant payments.

Another 172 people who suffered less severe injuries that required hospitalization or outpatient treatment have been offered compensation.

The claims arose from GM's recall of about 2.5 million small cars, mostly Chevrolet Cobalts and Saturn Ions, from the 2003 to 2007 models years. The switches on those cars sometimes slipped from the "on" position to "accessory" either from the weight of a key chain or from inadvertent contact with a driver's leg. That caused a loss of electrical power to the cars' steering and air bags.

An independent investigation by former federal prosecutor Anton Valukas found that several GM engineers knew about the problem as early as 2003. Some GM attorneys knew by 2013 that deaths may have been caused by the defect and they were settled with families of some victims. But the automaker did not begin recalling the cars equipped with the defective ignitions until February 2014.

GM and its dealers have replaced 70% to 75% of the recalled ignition switches.

Last month, GM Chief Financial Officer Chuck Stevens said the company raised its estimate of the total cost of the compensation fund from \$400 million to \$550 million.