

Fiat Chrysler says it was late on five recalls

Alisa Priddle and Chris Woodyard, Detroit Free Press and USA TODAY 10:53 p.m. EDT June 4, 2015



The new Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) Group sign is shown at the Chrysler Group headquarters

(Photo: Bill Pugliano, Getty Images)

DETROIT -- Fiat Chrysler Automobiles acknowledged in a filing Thursday that it was late in notifying customers of five safety recall campaigns.

In each of the five, FCA US told the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that it exceeded the 60-day limit of notifying owners of the recall. The late notifications ranged from a day to 12 days.

The acknowledgement came in an 18-page response to NHTSA, which has scheduled a July 2 hearing into alleged FCA footdragging on 20 recalls affecting 11 million vehicles. FCA filed five

million documents this week to try to fulfill a government's request, and the response provided the automaker's answers to specific questions.

FCA issued a comment after the response was posted on NHTSA's website. It said: "The initiatives described in our response to NHTSA's Special Order reflect a deep commitment to thorough investigation and the timely remedy of safety defects. While this commitment has helped FCA US achieve positive results, we will not be satisfied until we firmly re-establish the trust our customers place in us."

FCA wrote that its executives think the company was active enough in its recall efforts to warrant canceling the July 2 hearing. A NHTSA spokesman says it will proceed as scheduled.

The hearing "is a part of the process for determining whether the company has met its obligations," said NHTSA spokesman Gordon Trowbridge.

NHTSA has been critical of the auto industry, which has had a series of high-profile recalls. General Motors is under criminal investigation for not acting on a deadly ignition switch for more than a decade. Toyota was fined a record \$1.2 billion for misleading customers about unintended acceleration complaints. Almost 34 million vehicles from 11 automakers are being recalled for having air bags made by Japanese supplier Takata that can rupture and spew metal shards.

In its formal response, FCA said it has "diligently and reasonably searched all known sources of records likely to contain responsive information or documents, and has compiled the requested information and provided comprehensive answers to each and every question."

The Auburn Hills, Mich., automaker said it has already taken a number of actions including a senior management review and monthly report on all recall actions; emphasis on timely reaction to problems with investigators following up on complaints; a review of the recall process, and the creation of an executive review team with representatives from many departments to meet biweekly.

The automaker said it now has a stand-alone organization for vehicle safety and regulatory compliance and it has increased its staff by 65% in the past year.

Completion rates are good. FCA documentation shows an 83% completion rate is the industry average for a vehicle up to five years old. FCA spokesman Eric Mayne said the automaker's rate is better at 84%.