

# ***Auto Safety Agency Resists Broader Recall of Takata Airbags***

By STACY COWLEY FEB. 29, 2016

Under pressure from some lawmakers to [recall all Takata airbags](#), the nation's top auto safety regulator responded that such a recall would not improve public safety, and might exceed the agency's authority.

The recalls issued so far have focused on the highest-risk airbags, an approach that the regulator, the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#), considers prudent, Mark R. Rosekind, the agency's head, wrote in a letter sent on Friday to a senator.

“A blanket recall of all inflaters would be easier to explain, but it would not serve safety and could run the risk of exceeding N.H.T.S.A.'s statutory authority,” Mr. Rosekind wrote.

Takata's defective airbags, linked to 10 deaths and more than 100 injuries, have led to one of the largest safety recalls. Fourteen automakers have recalled 28 million airbag inflaters in about 24 million vehicles, but millions of cars with potentially defective inflaters remain on the road.

The cause of the airbags' malfunctions is a combination of factors including manufacturing issues; the chemical compound that Takata used as a propellant; and prolonged exposure to hot, humid weather, according to [a report released last week](#) by an independent engineering firm, Orbital ATK, that was hired by a group of automakers.

The problem appears to develop over time — a factor the safety agency cited in its letter, sent to Senator Bill Nelson, Democrat of Florida.

“Both field and test ruptures have been limited to older vehicles,” Mr. Rosekind wrote. The current recall list “ensures that the oldest, and therefore highest-risk, inflaters are addressed soonest.”

[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/business/auto-safety-agency-resists-broader-recall-of-takata-airbags.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/business/auto-safety-agency-resists-broader-recall-of-takata-airbags.html?_r=0)

A parts shortage has contributed to the complexity, forcing the owners of some recalled cars to wait weeks or even months for their airbags to be replaced.

Some of those who have had their airbags fixed face the prospect of having to do so a second time. The safety agency said it remained concerned about Takata's use of ammonium nitrate, the [volatile compound](#) cited as a factor in the airbags' failures.

In a consent order issued last year, the agency required Takata to stop using ammonium nitrate in its new airbags, but the company is still using the compound to fulfill some existing contracts. The supplier has until the end of 2018 to prove that ammonium nitrate is safe in existing airbags, and until the end of 2019 to prove that a newer version treated with a drying agent is safe.

If Takata cannot meet that standard, millions more airbags will need to be recalled.

Even if the safety agency wanted to issue a full recall right now, the logistics would be challenging, Mr. Rosekind said.

About 74 percent of the replacement inflaters for recalled cars are made by other suppliers, but for the remainder there are no readily available non-Takata replacements, he said in his letter.

“For some vehicles the only remedy currently available is a newer version of the same part, which may also degrade over time and need to be replaced again,” he wrote.

He cast that approach as the best of bad options, writing that “public safety is best served by getting as many old Takata inflaters out of vehicles as possible, even if it must be on an interim basis.”

Senator Nelson said he was unconvinced.

“I remain troubled by the fact that N.H.T.S.A. still seems to be deferring to Takata on a number of important issues,” he said in a statement. “If there’s one thing we have learned from our investigation, it’s that Takata can’t be trusted.”