

Six automakers to recall nearly 2.5 million U.S. vehicles over Takata airbags

GM contends recalls may not be necessary

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WASHINGTON -- Six automakers said today they are recalling nearly 2.5 million U.S. vehicles with defective Takata airbag inflators, documents posted with government regulators show.

These recalls include 1.9 million SUVs and trucks from General Motors, along with the recall of 217,000 vehicles from Volkswagen AG, 200,000

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from Mercedes-Benz, 92,000 from BMW, 54,000 from Jaguar Land Rover and 5,100 from Daimler Vans USA.

The new recalls came a day after Ford Motor Co. announced a recall of nearly 1.9 million vehicles for Takata inflators. Also, Ford today added 3,500 GTs from the 2005 and 2006 model years to its passenger-side inflator recall.

In total, 15 automakers have recalled nearly 16.4 million vehicles in the U.S. since last week stemming from Takata's decision in May to declare another 35 million to 40 million inflators with ammonium nitrate defective by 2019.

Upward of 100 million vehicles worldwide with Takata airbag inflators have been recalled and are linked to 13 deaths and more than 100 injuries because inflators can explode with too much force and spray metal shrapnel into vehicle passenger compartments.

Takata Corp. said last month it hired investment bank Lazard Ltd. to lead a financial restructuring in an effort to resolve costs stemming from its recall of faulty airbags.

The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said newer airbag inflators don't pose an immediate risk to safety until subjected to years of exposure to high humidity.

Automakers have acknowledged the inflators were the cause of 11 deaths -- 10 in Honda vehicles and one in a Ford pickup -- while two more deaths in Malaysia remain under investigation.

New recalls

GM said today its new recall includes some 2007-2011 full-size trucks and SUVs for passenger-side airbag inflators.

But GM told U.S. regulators it may not be necessary to recall many of the Takata-equipped vehicles, according to documents filed with the NHTSA. GM said its Takata inflators have a unique design that does not pose a safety risk.

The largest U.S. automaker said its data shows no cases of an airbag rupturing among 44,000 deployments in large pickups and SUVs that contain Takata inflators.

The Takata inflators used in GM trucks and large SUVs are designed with different venting for hot gases released when the airbag deploys, and they are installed in the vehicle in a way that minimizes exposure to moisture, the company said.

"GM believes that the vehicles it manufactured with these inflators do not contain a present defect which poses an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety," the automaker stated in a document filed with the NHTSA.

GM said it plans additional testing to make the case that its vehicles are safe.

GM's stance is at odds with the position regulators took last month when they said all frontal Takata airbag inflators without a drying agent must be recalled.

"The science clearly shows that these inflators become unsafe over time, faster when exposed to humidity and variations of temperature," NHTSA spokesman Bryan Thomas said today.

Phased-in recall

NHTSA took the unusual, if not unprecedented, step of ordering a phased recall of Takata inflators that stretches over the next three and a half years. Under this approach, manufacturers of the covered vehicles will issue recall notices in five waves, with each wave hitting just before the inflators become prone to developing the same dangerous defect that has been linked to the fatal accidents and injuries in the U.S.

In effect, it is a just-in-time recall.

The approach is made possible by NHTSA's unique application of its legal powers to wrestle the industry's most pervasive and challenging recall into submission. It takes into account the results of several investigations into the causes of the rupture as well as the need to closely manage the supply of replacement inflators.

GM spokesman Tom Wilkinson said NHTSA's recall schedule, announced last month, "can be modified based on additional research. The total number of vehicles and potential schedule for recalls will be determined accordingly."

GM also is establishing a part return program to collect and test Takata inflators recovered from GM vehicles.

On Wednesday, a U.S. Senate report said four automakers were continuing to sell some new vehicles with defective Takata airbag inflators that will eventually need to be recalled. Automakers cited engineering and supply challenges to explain why they are still relying on the faulty airbags.

Ryan Beene and Nick Bunkley of Automotive News contributed to this report.