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News Release

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The Safety Institute Announces Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List: Tracking Top 15 Potential Vehicle Defects

Today, The Safety Institute is releasing the latest report from its quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List. Steering problems in the 2012 Ford Focus again top the second quarterly Watch List. (See first quarterly [Watch List](#)). Other notable potential defects are malfunctioning service brakes in 2011 and 2012 Chevy Cruze vehicles and speed control issues in Toyota Camrys.

Using publicly available data such as NHTSA consumer complaints in the Vehicle Owners Questionnaire (VOQ) database, manufacturer-reported Early Warning Reports on deaths and injuries, and the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), The Safety Institute Watch List identifies potential motor vehicle safety defects that merit additional engineering and statistical review.

Today's release shows that the top identified problem involves injury claims about the steering of the 2012 Ford Focus. These claims may be associated with complaints to NHTSA about two separate issues: allegations that the electric power steering shuts down randomly and intermittently as well as complaints about delaminating steering wheels that lacerate drivers' hands.

For example, one driver lodged this complaint on June 18, 2014:

The steering wheel has sharp metal edges protruding from the top of the wheel. While driving on the highway, I sliced my finger on the edge. Not a major incident... but upon

reviewing the Internet this is apparently a common issue with the Ford Focus... My hope is that Ford will repair or replace the metal on the wheel so it is no longer a danger while driving."

There are currently no open investigations by NHTSA regarding the 2012 Ford Focus.

Other notable injury claims in the early warning reporting data concern the service brakes of the 2011 and 2012 Chevy Cruze, which, respectively, occupy the number two and three positions on the list. In August 2103, General Motors recalled 293,000 2011MY and 2012MY Cruze vehicle for intermittent loss of the brake assist. Consumer complaints to NHTSA mention brake failures even after the recall repair was performed:

For a MY 2011 Cruze incident on May 27, 2014:

Chevy Cruze after recall # 12213 for brake vacuum micro switch has been completed. The vehicle is displaying the exact same symptoms as before the recall work was done...

For a 2012 Chevy Cruze incident on June 30, 2014:

... The driver indicated that during the incident the brakes malfunctioned and did not stop the vehicle... The contact indicated that the remedy for the NHTSA campaign number 13V36000... was previously performed on the vehicle."

These complaints may indicate that the recall repairs were improperly performed or that they did not resolve a potential defect with a root cause that has not been properly identified.

Camry speed control complaints are again a standout. Injury claims related to speed control problems, including potential unintended acceleration incidents, have placed the 2007 Toyota Camry, the 2005 Camry, the 2006 Camry, and the 2009 Camry in the current Watch List's 5th, 8th, 11th, and 12th places. This pattern strongly suggests that Toyota's recalls for floor mats and sticky accelerator pedals have not succeeded in eliminating complaints and claims, and that vehicles not included in the recalls continue to experience problems.

"The Safety Institute's Vehicle Safety Watch List provides an opportunity for regulators and manufacturers to examine unusual patterns of claims and resolve them before they become major crises" said Sean Kane, founder and president of the board of directors of The Safety Institute.

The most recent Congressional investigations into the General Motors ignition switch safety scandal emphasize once again that the early detection of potential vehicle safety issues benefits everyone through the opportunity to reduce deaths, injuries, and financial losses.

Attorney Lance Cooper, whose work on behalf of the family of a woman who died in a crash caused by the switch failure brought the defect to light, says that the Watch List can prevent future tragedies.

“The GM debacle demonstrates the importance of using analytical tools and examining the data. Our hope that Watch List will become an important metric for consumers as well as for manufacturers and regulators.” Cooper said.

About the List

The Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List is a product of the Institute’s Vehicle Safety Watch List Analytics and the NHTSA Enforcement Monitoring Program. Lance Cooper, of the Cooper Firm in Marietta, Ga., sponsors the program in memory of Brooke Melton, who died in a 2010 crash caused by the sudden failure of the ignition in her 2005 Chevy Cobalt. The Watch List is compiled using on peer-reviewed analytic methods, with support from Quality Control Systems Corp. These reports are intended to help the public recognize emerging problems in the U.S. fleet and to identify continuing failures potentially associated with known problems.

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The Safety Institute examines areas of injury prevention and product safety across a broad spectrum. The Institute bases its plans and priorities on issues that require greater study and emphasis, as well as those which may be underserved by other organizations and advocates. The Institute gives special attention to those areas of emerging importance to injury and product safety, including the effects of new and changing technologies.