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News Release

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The Safety Institute Announces Melton Sponsorship and Release of Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List: Tracking Top 15 Potential Vehicle Defects

Today, The Safety Institute (TSI) announces that the Melton family will sponsor the Vehicle Safety Watch List in memory of their daughter Brooke, who died in a 2010 crash caused by a well-known ignition switch defect in her 2005 Chevy Cobalt. Brooke Melton, 29, died when she skidded into another vehicle after the ignition module of her 2005 Cobalt slipped into the accessory position. Documents and evidence developed in the Melton case found that GM knew about the ignition switch problem as early as 2001. Ken and Beth Melton, of Cobb County, Georgia, decided to provide ongoing support to the significant research and analysis that the Watch List provides, in hope of preventing future tragedies.

“Brooke would still be alive if GM had acknowledged the ignition defect and fixed it. Brooke would be alive if the regulators had followed up on their own investigations which revealed the problem,” Ken Melton said.

Brooke Melton’s 2010 death was initially deemed the result of a loss-of-control crash on a rainy night. But the Melton’s persistent pursuit of justice revealed GM’s longstanding knowledge of a defective ignition module that could shift out of the run position while a vehicle is underway, turning off the airbags at the same time it is cutting off the engine power, anti-lock brakes and power steering. After GM reported the defect and launched a limited recall, the Meltons asked the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in February 2014 to open an investigation into GM’s actions.

That investigation eventually led to \$35 million in civil fines levied against GM, and nearly 15 million vehicles recalled. Congress held hearings on GM’s deception and

NHTSA's failures to probe the defect when it first learned about airbag deployment failures in 2007. The ignition switch defect is also at the center of a multi-district litigation (MDL).

The Melton's sponsorship coincides with the release of its latest quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List. For the fourth quarter in a row, potential steering issues affecting the 2012 Ford Focus top the list. (See first, second and third quarterly Watch List). In addition, Toyota continues to occupy several spots for potential structure and unintended acceleration claims, and General Motors remains on the list for potential service brake issues. None of these issues have been investigated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) or effectively remedied by the manufacturer.

Other potential defects that continue to make the Watch List include structure issues in the 2005 Toyota Sienna in 12th place. The 2011 Chevy Cruze is 10th place for potentially malfunctioning service brakes. Speed control complaints are again a standout for the Toyota Camry -- the 2007 Toyota Camry, the 2005 Camry, and the 2006 Camry, occupy the 8th, 13th, and 14th places in the current Watch List.

The Chevrolet Cobalt's prominent position on the list for claims related to the electrical system may be due, in part, to the establishment of General Motor's claims resolution program related to the ignition switch. Its position on future editions of the Watch List may alert the public to the ineffectiveness of GM's ignition switch recalls and remedies. According to consumer complaints, many owners who claim electrical failures related to stalling and failed steering state that their cars already have been "repaired."

Newcomers to the list are the 2011 Chevrolet HHR for potential electrical issues and the 2008 Toyota Rav4 for potential suspension issues.

Some manufacturers have initiated recalls that may be related to issues on the list, but death and injury claims continue to mount. These complaints may indicate that the recall repairs were improperly performed or that they did not resolve a potential defect, or the root-cause has not been properly identified.

"The Watch List was launched following the continued failure of manufacturers and regulators to identify and quickly act on dangerous defects like the GM ignition switch. Our intent is to provide scientifically valid data on problems showing up in the vehicle fleets so that they can be investigated and resolved sooner" said Sean Kane, The Safety Institute's founder and president of the board.

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.

The Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List, launched in 2014, 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., previously sponsored the program in memory of Brooke Melton. 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.