

The Safety Institute Announces Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List of Top 15 Potential Vehicle Defects: Chevrolet Electrical Problems Dominate

Today, The Safety Institute is releasing the latest report from its quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List. Electrical problems in Chevrolet vehicles, as documented by death and injury claims found in manufacturers' 2015 Early Warning Reports, continue to dominate the Watch List. Other trending potential defects are speed control issues in the 2009 Camry and structural issues in the 2008 Buick Enclave.

General Motors reported sufficient death and injury claims regarding structural problems in the 2008 Buick Enclave to win the top spot on the Quarterly Watch List. According to complaints filed in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Vehicle Owners Questionnaires database, there are problems with the lift gate suddenly and inadvertently dropping down, striking owners' heads.

Chevy vehicles – specifically the Cobalt, the HHR and the Malibu – continue to be standouts for death and injury claims, occupying four spots in the first six positions. Claims related to steering problems in the 2006 Malibu place third on the list. Death and injury claims related to electrical issues placed the 2006 Cobalt and the 2010 Cobalt the fourth and sixth spots respectively; the 2011 HHR vehicles were second on the list. The 2006 Cobalt topped the Watch List last quarter.

In 2014, GM recalled a total of 29 million vehicles in North America for an ignition switch defect, which could shut down the vehicle's engine, cutting off the power steering and braking systems and disabling the airbags. The preponderance of death and injury claims related to electrical problems in GM vehicles is an area that warrants further investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The 2009 Toyota Camry won the list's fifth spot for speed control problems. In addition, The Safety Institute found that Toyota owners continue to lodge complaints with NHTSA about unintended acceleration. Camry has been the target of NHTSA investigations and recalls for speed control problems. It has occupied a place on the Watch List for two years, suggesting that the correct problem has not been identified or the recall remedy was ineffective.

Manufacturers are only required to report EWR claims involving the 10 previous model years, so no 2005 model year will appear on future Watch Lists; 2006 model year vehicles -- including the 2006 Chevrolet Malibu and the 2006 Chevrolet Cobalt - will be next to drop off the Watch Lists because of loop hole in the Early Warning Reporting law. The absence of a model year does not necessarily reflect a decrease in death and injury claims, or problems reported elsewhere.

Some manufacturers have initiated recalls that may be related to issues on the list, but those recalls have not stopped the death and injury claims. These claims 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 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. 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.

The Melton family of Cobb County, Georgia sponsors the Vehicle Safety Watch List in memory of their daughter Brooke, who died in a 2010 crash caused by an 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, provide ongoing support to the significant research and analysis that the Watch List provides, in hopes of preventing future tragedies.

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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