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## **News Release**

**Thursday November 7, 2015**

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### **The Safety Institute Announces Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List of Top 15 Potential Vehicle Defects: Jeep Cherokee Transmission Problems Rise to the Top**

Today, The Safety Institute releases the latest report from its quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List. Powertrain problems in 2014 and 2015 Jeep Cherokee vehicles took the first two spots, as documented by death and injury claims found in manufacturers' Early Warning Reports. Problems with GM vehicles make up nearly half the list, according to manufacturers' claims filed in the third quarter of 2015 through the second quarter of 2016. Structural issues in the 2008 Buick Enclave dropped from first on last quarter's list to third place; electrical problems in the Chevrolet Cobalt and HHR and speed control issues in Toyota Camrys continue to occupy spots on the Watch List.

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.

In April 2016, Fiat Chrysler recalled 811,586 2012-2014 Dodge Charger and Chrysler 300 vehicles, and 2014-2015 Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles equipped with a monostable gear selector that "may not adequately warn the driver when driver's door is opened and the vehicle is not in PARK, allowing them to exit the vehicle while the vehicle is still in gear," according to Fiat Chrysler's recall submissions to NHTSA. The automaker blamed drivers for their mistaken belief that they had shifted the transmission into the Park position, and implemented a software update that would automatically shift the vehicle into Park upon the driver's exit.

Among the numerous Vehicle Owners Questionnaires (VOQ) in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) database, are complaints about the transmission shifting independently while the vehicle was underway, that the misleading shifter design had caused the driver to mistakenly leave the vehicle in gear, that recall fix was not available or that the recall fix had failed to address the problem.

Vehicle owners also continue to complain to NHTSA that the automated liftgate on the 2008 Buick suddenly drops down, striking owners' heads and backs with sufficient force to cause injuries. Here's one such complaint:

The contact owns a 2008 Buick Enclave. While retrieving packages out of the trunk, the liftgate dropped down and pinned the contact between the door and the trunk. The contact's husband managed to free her and the ambulance was called. The contact sustained injuries to the spine, disc area, and right leg. Medical attention was received. The vehicle was taken to the dealer and repaired.

Claims involving speed control problems in 2009 Toyota Camry vehicles have risen since the last quarter – the vehicle moved from the tenth spot to the sixth spot. According to VOQs to NHTSA, owners are complaining about unintended acceleration incidents which occurred in parking scenarios, on the highway and at lower speeds – much as owners have been complaining about the Camry unintended acceleration for 13 years. Camry in earlier model years 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.

The 2006 Chevrolet Cobalt for electrical problems dropped from the fourth to the eighth spot on this quarter's list. 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 Vehicle Owner Questionnaires submitted to NHTSA suggest more widespread electrical issues, with owners complaining about steering, ignitions, power locks and deceleration failures. 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.

For the first time on the Watch List vehicles have made the list, without a specific component associated with the death or injury claim. The 2007 Chevrolet Cobalt made the fifth place and the 2009 Chevrolet Cobalt on the list again in the 12<sup>th</sup> position for claims in which the component was listed as "unknown." The 2007 Lexus IS in the ninth position and the 2014 Toyota Camry in the 11<sup>th</sup> place on the list in which "other" is cited in the component category.

These designations are puzzling, given the broad nature of the component categories. An examination of VOQs for vehicles in the "other" component category hint at the basis of death and injury claims. Complaints associated with the Lexus IS, for example, mention melting dashboards coupled with glare problems. It is possible that Toyota might code a death or injury claim related to crash caused by the glare of a melted dashboard as "other." Consumer complaints of mold in the 2014 Camry's heating and cooling system may explain EWR death and injury claims that would be coded as "other."

But the consumer complaints for the 2007 Cobalt and the 2009 Cobalt are too varied to identify any emerging potential defect trends.

Manufacturers are only required to report EWR claims involving the 10 previous model years, so 2005 model year vehicles are highly unlikely to appear on future Watch Lists; 2006 model year vehicles are the next group likely to drop off future lists. 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** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that 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.