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News Release

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The Safety Institute Announces Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List of Top 15 Potential Vehicle Defects: Jeep Transmission Issues Continue to Dominate

Today, The Safety Institute is releasing the latest report from its quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List. Once again, based on death and injury claims found in Early Warning Reports, powertrain problems in 2014 and 2015 Jeep Cherokee vehicles occupy the top two spots, and problems with GM vehicles make up nearly half the list, according to manufacturers' claims filed in the fourth quarter of 2015 through the third quarter of 2016. Structural issues in the 2008 Buick Enclave, electrical problems in the Chevrolet Cobalt and speed control issues in Toyota Camrys continue to make the Watch List

Using publicly available data such as the consumer complaints in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's 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 longevity of Toyota Camry speed control problems are worthy of special mention. Claims involving speed control problems in 2009 Toyota Camry vehicles are sixth on the Watch List for the second quarter in a row. According to VOQs to NHTSA, owners are complaining about unintended acceleration incidents which occurred in parking scenarios, on the highway and at lower speeds; many resulted in crashes. The 2009 Toyota Camry has been subject to two speed-control-related recalls: a 2009 campaign to correct unsecured or incompatible floor mats that could trap an accelerator pedal in an open position; and a 2010 recall for a problem with a malfunctioning friction lever that, in some circumstances, could cause the accelerator pedal to become harder to press, slow to return to idle or stick in a partially depressed position. Indeed, some complaints are related to these recalls. For example, ODI 10461897 reports: "The contact stated that the accelerator pedal would stick while driving. The failure recurred intermittently." ODI 10492441 reports: "The consumer stated the accelerator pedal, became stuck under the

carpet of the mat. The right rear side of the vehicle struck a retaining fence and caused him to spin around. The consumer suffered minor injuries.”

However, many more complaints to NHTSA appeared unrelated to either of these conditions:

From ODI 10516217: “The contact owns a 2009 Toyota Camry LE. The contact stated that while stopped at a traffic light, the vehicle accelerated independently and crashed into two vehicles.”

From ODI 10626455: “While the vehicle was idling and the brake pedal depressed, the vehicle suddenly accelerated without warning. The contact applied more pressure to the brake pedal, but the vehicle failed to stop. In order to stop the vehicle, the contact shifted into neutral and depressed the brake pedal continuously.”

From ODI 10462959: “While backing out of my garage unto the driveway and then into the street, it caused a unintended acceleration while driving in reverse, causing almost a 90 degree spin and I had to slam on the brakes for it to finally stop. This happened once on 4/18/12 and then again the exact same thing happened again on 6/8/2012.”

Despite these recalls and several NHTSA investigations into similar complaints involving earlier model years, the Toyota Camry has been plagued with speed control problems since 2002, when Toyota installed its Electronic Throttle Control –Intelligent (ETC-i) system. Toyota Camry vehicles with speed control problems have occupied a position on all 10 Watch Lists released so far.

The 2014-2015 Jeep Grand Cherokee and the 2012 Chrysler 300 vehicles took the top three spots for powertrain problems that appear to correlate with the April 2016 Fiat Chrysler recall for vehicles equipped with a monostable gear selector. The new gear selector “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 the automaker’s recall submissions to NHTSA. Fiat Chrysler blamed drivers for their mistaken belief that they had shifted the transmission into the Park position, but implemented a software update that would automatically shift the vehicle into Park upon the driver’s exit.

Structural issues in the 2008 Buick Enclave also remain in the top five. In June 2015, GM recalled the Enclave for liftgate gas struts that could wear out, causing the gate to suddenly all. Complaints filed in the NHTSA’s Vehicle Owners Questionnaires database, indicate that lift gates are still inadvertently dropping down, striking owners’ heads, backs and necks.

Other perennial Watch List vehicles include the 2007 and 2009 Chevrolet Cobalt for electrical problems. 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. This defect reportedly resulted in 124 fatalities and 274 injuries, and triggered Congressional and NHTSA investigations, and scores of lawsuits. This quarterly report finds the Chrysler 300, which was also included in the ignition switch recall, in the list’s third place. The Vehicle Owner Questionnaires submitted to NHTSA suggest more widespread electrical issues, with owners complaining about stalling, 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 NHTSA.

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 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.