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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: Honda Odyssey Seat Failures, Nissan Hood Latches and Ford CO Problems Dominate

Today, The Safety Institute is releasing the latest report from its quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List. The 2016 Toyota Tundra with structure problems rose to the top. But other, more serious potential safety defects continued to show up in clusters, spread over several years of a particular model. The three are: carbon monoxide seeping into the occupant compartments of 1.3 million Ford Explorers, Honda Odyssey seats that fold over and fail to lock in place, and Nissan Altima hood latches that give way with no warning.

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 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 Tundra structure problems correlate to a January recall for 72,847 light trucks in the 2016 and 2017 model years to replace reinforcement brackets at the outboard corners of the rear step bumper that apparently can be easily damaged, causing the bumper to break off. Drivers have complained to the agency that the repair was not available months after the recall. Others reported that they sustained injuries when they stepped on the bumper and it broke off.

The Ford Explorer carbon monoxide problem, increasing to five spots on the list, indicate that the problem is intensifying. The 2015 Ford Explorer is in third place; the 2014 Explorer is in fourth place; the 2013 Explorer in tenth place; and the 2017 model year in the 15th spot in the "engine and engine cooling" and "other" categories. The complaints to NHTSA suggest that the Explorers' strong showing this quarter is related to carbon monoxide escaping into the SUV's

cabin. Last July, the agency bumped up the probe to an Engineering Analysis, with 2,842 complaints to Ford and NHTSA. The investigation now covers 2011-2017 Explorers. The issue has been the subject of news stories, as some of the victims were police departments, which use the Interceptor, a law enforcement version of the Explorer. Departments reported that at least five officers lost consciousness, were hospitalized for CO exposure or crashed their vehicles. The Engineering Analysis remains open.

Second row seating problems in the Honda Odyssey showed up for the second quarter in a row, with more model years claiming a spot on the Safety Watch List. Honda has twice recalled the minivans, in December 2016 and November 2017, for problems with second row seats that don't stay locked. The recall notice blamed the problem on "surface roughness on internal parts, reduced torque on the return spring (as a result of manufacturing variability), inconsistent/inadequate grease application, and potential grease hardening under specific temperature and humidity ranges, there is potential for the seat to stay in the unlocked position (free-sliding) after returning the seat to its normal seating position." In 2016, the automaker recalled 633,753 2011-2016 vehicles; the following year, Honda recalled another 806,936 vehicles from 2011-2017 model years. (Last month, a Cincinnati teen died when he became trapped in the third row bench seat of a 2004 Odyssey and suffocated.)

The Nissan Altima in the 2013 and 2014 model years are in the seventh and 13th spots, respectively, for hood latch problems. Nissan has launched recalls in 2014, 2015 and 2016 to repair the secondary hood latch in a variety of models. For example, in 2015 Nissan recalled 170,665 2013-2014 Nissan Pathfinder and Infiniti JX35/QX60 vehicles manufactured in the Smyrna, Tennessee plant. Nissan identified the problem as "hood release cable assembly may be installed incorrectly, effectively shortening the cable length which prevents the latching claw from fully engaging. This causes the secondary latch to remain in the open position when the hood is closed."

The 2014-2015 Jeep Grand Cherokee are now in second and eleventh spots, respectively. In April 2016 Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) recall for vehicles equipped with a monostable gear selector. According to the Fiat's recall submissions, 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." 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. The most recent complaints suggest that Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles are suffering from other transmission problems related to stalls at high speed and unintended acceleration. Whether FCA software patch has caused other problems is a question that may be worth investigating.

Structural issues in the GMC Acadia seemed to have receded, even as the vehicle has continued to appear on the Watch List for six straight quarters. In June 2015, GM recalled lift gate gas struts that could wear out, causing the gate to suddenly fall, striking occupants' heads, necks and backs. In the past, consumer complaints to NHTSA indicate that falling lift gates continued to be a problem – in part, because consumers report that GM has not made replacement parts available

– or because their vehicle’s build date put it outside the bounds of the recall. Although EWR claims continue to accrue, complaints dropped off after 2015.

Speed control problems in the 2010 Toyota Prius vehicle continues to be ranked – in the 12th spot of the Safety Watch List.

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