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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: CO in Fords and Honda's Sliding Seats are Top-Ranked**

Today, The Safety Institute is releasing the latest report from its quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List, covering the first quarter of 2018. Exhaust problems in Ford Explorers, and Honda Odyssey seats that fold over and fail to lock in place once again dominate the Watch List, taking nine of the 15 spots. Structure problems in the 2016 Toyota Sienna are new to the list, in two spots.

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 our 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.

Ford's carbon monoxide problem in late-model Explorers continues to plague owners. The SUV, in various model years, is back up to occupying five spots on the list. The 2017 model is in first place; the 2015 Ford Explorer is in second place; the 2016 Explorer is in third place; the 2013 Explorer in eighth place; and the 2014 model year in the twelfth place – all in the “engine and engine cooling” categories. The complaints to NHTSA still indicate that the Explorers' strong showing this quarter appears related to carbon monoxide escaping into the SUV's cabin. Police departments, which use the Interceptor, a law enforcement version of the Explorer, have reported that at least five officers lost consciousness, were hospitalized for CO exposure or crashed their vehicles. In July, the Center for Auto Safety again demanded that Ford launch an immediate recall, as the government investigation into the problem dragged into its second year. In July 2017, the agency upgraded a probe to an Engineering Analysis, with 2,842 complaints to Ford and NHTSA. The investigation now covers 2011-2017 Explorers.

Ford offered free fixes – if customers asked, which, according to a July CBS news report, the automaker claimed was effective: “Explorers are safe. Owner complaints to Ford and NHTSA have decreased since we announced our complimentary service for exhaust odor last fall as it effectively resolves the matter.”

Some consumers disagree. They are still reporting problems to NHTSA, similar to this August complaint by the owner of a 2017 Ford Explorer from Benson North Carolina:

We continue to have nausea, dizziness, headaches and at times extreme sleepiness. A few months ago Ford sent us a safety notice, stating they would reprogram the air conditioner. They stated this would fix exhaust gases entering the vehicle. This re-programing has not fixed the problem. We continue to have exhaust smells in the vehicle, especially on acceleration. We continue to have nausea, dizziness, headaches, sleepiness, and sometimes periods of confusion.

The NHTSA Engineering Analysis remains open.

Second row seating problems in the Honda Odyssey are now on the Watch List for the fourth consecutive quarter – again, with three model years claiming a spot on the Safety Watch List. This quarter, the 2016, the 2015 and 2013 model years occupied the fourth, seventh and 10<sup>th</sup> spots respectively. Honda has twice recalled the minivans, in December 2016 and December 2017. The most recent recall involved 806,936 2011-2016 minivans with second seating that failed to latch in place or could tip over. The seats are still creating scary moments for parents who have children occupying the second row, and owners continue to complaint about the unavailability of recall repair parts. Here’s a typical complaint to NHTSA reported in January from a 2015 Odyssey owner in Littleton, Colorado:

Recently while driving with my two sons in the outward position in the middle row, a strange clicking came from the driver side middle seat. My 5 y/o son said "my seat is moving". The back of the seat was no longer locked into position and was moving freely back and forth with minimal effort. We were doing normal stop and go, rush hour city driving with no hard stops and no sudden brakes. I contacted the dealer who said there was a recall however the parts were not available yet.

Toyota Sienna minivans with a power sliding door defect are newcomers to the Safety Watch List, with two model years – the 2013 and 2011 -- ranked ninth and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively. This correlates to a November 2016 recall for 744, 437 2011-2016 Toyota Siennas that suddenly slide open while the vehicle is underway. In its Defect and Noncompliance Report, Toyota stated that “under certain limited conditions which impede the opening of the door, such as when the door becomes frozen with ice, the sliding door motor could stall when the door is operated. If the motor stalls, high current in the door motor circuit could be generated, operating the fuse for the door motor. If the fuse is operated with the sliding door latch mechanism in an unlatched position, the door could open while driving, increasing the risk of injury to a vehicle occupant.” Here’s a March complaint from a 2013 Sienna owner from Chenanto Forks, New York:

I had the recent sliding door recall done but my driver's side sliding door still isn't working correctly. After the fix the car was hard to start sometimes, as if the battery was

getting weak. I put an ammeter on the positive lead of the battery and notices minimal amperage until I started operating the driver side sliding door, then there was a 2.4 amp draw even after the doors were closed and the car was locked. The door also sometimes will open with a popping noise as if the door isn't latching properly sometimes.

The 2016 Toyota Tundra is in sixth place with structure problems that correlate to a January Toyota 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. While there is a May complaint, most of reports to NHTSA's Vehicle Owner Questionnaires petered out after September of 2017.

Jeep Grand Cherokees, which have occupied a prominent place on the Watch List for several quarters due to transmission and gear shifter problems, dropped to last place. The 2014 Grand Cherokee 4 x 4 is in 15<sup>th</sup> place due to power train issues. The VOQs do not indicate a single defect trend, although some complain of stalling. In April 2016, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) recalled vehicles equipped with a monostable gear selector because the gear selector did 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."

Likewise, there is no identifiable trend in the few complaints concerning structural problems in the 2017 Audi 4. This model occupies the 11<sup>th</sup> place on the 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