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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: Subaru Unintended Braking is an Emerging Problem; CO in Fords and Honda's Sliding Seats Still Top-Ranked**

Today, The Safety Institute is releasing the latest report from its Vehicle Safety Watch List, covering the last quarter of 2018. For the third quarter in a row, exhaust problems in Ford Explorers, and Honda Odyssey seats that fold over and fail to lock in place claimed the most spots on the Watch List – seven out of the 15 spots. The Subaru Outback in model years 2016 and 2018 with unintended braking problems has emerged as a potential new defect trend.

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.

Beginning with this quarter, The Safety Institute, in consultation with statistician Randy Whitfield of Quality Control Systems Corp., has refined its methodology by restricting the pool of EWR claims analyzed to those with incidents that occurred within the same four quarter look-back period in which the claims were made. This lessens the dominance of older, potential defects that are already well-known.

“It's an improvement, because the listed issues better reflect claims of more recent death and injury incidents,” Whitfield says.

New to the list are unintended braking problems associated with the forward collision feature that is a part of Subaru's EyeSight Driver Assist Technology. The Subaru Outback, in model years 2016 and 2018, has claimed the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> spots respectively, but with a scant (two) Vehicle Owner Questionnaire (VOQ) complaints to NHTSA. The most recent one is from a Tipp City, Ohio owner of a 2016 Outback, lodged in December:

“While driving approximately 45 mph on a local roadway, the eyesight pre-collision brake assist suddenly activated and caused the vehicle to completely stop. The brakes released shortly after the failure.”

An examination of the larger universe of EyeSight complaints from drivers' forums and NHTSA VOQs shows that unintended brake application is among the more prominent malfunctions of the system. Should NHTSA take an interest in this problem, ferreting out the root cause(s) would be challenging. The Eyesight system uses the camera exclusively for forward collision braking, and there are no redundant radar sensors. As a result, everything from the windshield/camera lens condition/cleanliness to the camera lens calibration, to the application of non-OE windshield replacements to encounters with external elements and objects could affect proper operation. In addition, here are hundreds of other parts/components/systems that could fail and potentially cause false activation.

Subaru has touted EyeSight as “the culmination of everything Subaru engineers know about safety, and Subaru has sold over 1 million Eyesight-equipped vehicles. Adding confidence to every trip, EyeSight monitors traffic movement, optimizes cruise control, and warns you if you sway outside your lane. EyeSight has been found to reduce rear-end crashes with injuries by up to 85%” Subaru does not reveal how many rear-end crashes EyeSight might have caused with abrupt unintended braking.

Carbon monoxide problems in late model Ford Explorers dominate the list for the seventh consecutive quarter, with four spots on the list. The 2017 model is in first place; the 2015 Ford Explorer is in second place; the 2016 Explorer is in seventh place; and the 2013 Explorer in eighth place in the “engine and engine cooling” categories. Once again, complaints to NHTSA as recently as late December indicate that the Explorers vehicles continue to spew carbon monoxide into the SUV's cabin. This complaint from a Burke, Virginia owner of a 2015 model is typical:

When accelerating, smell fumes and onset of dizziness and blurred vision while driving. Immediately slowed down (almost to a stop) in mid-traffic and opened windows, allowing fresh air to blow in. Dizziness went away after a minute or two. Happened twice...very scary experience. Carbon monoxide poisoning? Never experienced this before nor outside of vehicle. Already had exhaust problem fix by dealer...still having issues. This is getting dangerous.

Last July, the Center for Auto Safety again demanded that Ford launch an immediate recall, as the government investigation entered into its second year. That same month, the agency upgraded a probe to an Engineering Analysis, with 2,842 complaints to Ford and NHTSA. The investigation now covers 2011-2017 Explorers. It remains open, with nothing in the public file to indicate what information has been provided.

In November, Ford continued to claim, this time to NBC News that it had the problem well in hand: “We continually monitor customer concerns, including those to NHTSA. We are confident our complimentary service procedure is effective.”

Second row seating problems in the Honda Odyssey are now on the Watch List for the fifth consecutive quarter – again, with three model years claiming a spot on the Safety Watch List. This quarter, the 2015, the 2016 and 2013 model years occupied the fourth, ninth and 12<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 nightmares for parents who have children strapped into the second row, and the complaints about the unavailability of recall repair parts continues. In April, the owner of a 2013 Honda Odyssey from Harker Heights, Texas reported: “2nd seat flipped over a kid seated on the right middle row passenger seat while car was driving/in motion. This has been ongoing and this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time this has happened. The kid became trapped, folded at the waist in a seated position until we were able to pull over the van to reset the seat.”

Toyota Sienna minivans with a power sliding door defect made the Safety Watch List for the second consecutive quarter, with the 2013 model year ranked 11<sup>th</sup>. This may be linked 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.”

There are no identifiable trends in the few complaints concerning structural problems in the 2017 Audi 4 – even though this model moved up from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the fifth place on the Watch List. Likewise for the 2015 and 2016 Volkswagen Golf which occupies the third and 10<sup>th</sup> spots, respectively. There are only a handful of complaints to NHTSA in each case, although a smattering of drivers complained of exploding sun roofs. Both Audi and Volkswagen have launched sunroof recalls in the past, but not for these models.

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