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The Safety Institute Announces Quarterly Vehicle Safety Watch List of Top 15 Potential Vehicle Defects: Subaru Unintended Braking Remains a 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 claims of deaths and injuries through the third quarter of 2018. Exhaust problems in Ford Explorers tops the list; and Honda Odyssey seats that fail to lock in place and malfunctioning Sienna sliding doors are still plaguing vehicle owners. Subaru is back with unintended braking problems linked to its EyeSight Driver Assist Technology.

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 last quarter, The Safety Institute 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, to lessen the dominance of older, potential defects that are already well-known.

Carbon monoxide problems in late model Ford Explorers dominate the list for the eighth consecutive quarter, but now only occupying three spots on the list. The 2017 model is, again, in first place; the 2016 Explorer is in sixth place; and the 2015 Ford Explorer is in 14th 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 allow carbon monoxide to seep into the SUV's cabin. This complaint from an Apopka, Florida owner of a 2017 Ford Explorer who had the remedy applied expresses the exasperation of many:

Exhaust still entering cabin following Ford corrective measures. This vehicle has been serviced for this seemingly ongoing issue using the corrective measures specified on the most recent

Technical Service bulletin (17no3); however, the carcinogens and carbon monoxide produced by the exhaust are still entering the cabin following acceleration. As with other serious complaints involving this vehicle, the odor is a delayed response to acceleration, but very evident. As NHTSA is the consumer's avenue for assistance in protecting their health and safety, this ongoing open investigation should result in creating provisions that demand this company take ethical measures in preventing toxic substances from entering their vehicles. The open NHTSA investigation has already concluded, "Ford has issued multiple TBSs related to the exhaust odor issue, and in some cases revised Those documents multiple times." If the manufacturer is continuously generating new technical bulletins, but complaints are still being raised! With models as old as 2011, the end result is that the manufacturer is not taking these incidences seriously enough. Ford needs to be forced into correcting a disastrous design in their exhaust system as the technical service bulletins are obviously not producing results needed to protect consumers. Practices such as reprogramming the air handling NHTSA consumer complaints as of March 12, 2019 system to allow for more "fresh air" to come into the cabin when accelerating is counterintuitive to preventing exhaust from entering the cabin. Measures to protect consumers from these toxins should be the only NHTSA conclusion. The fact that this has been ongoing since 2011, with no corrective change in the exhaust's design is also clear indicator that the manufacturer is not interested in taking this seriously. For now, rolling windows down during acceleration is the only measure to protect against these toxins!

There has been no action by Ford or NHTSA since July 2018, when the Center for Auto Safety demanded that Ford launch an immediate recall and the agency upgraded a probe to an Engineering Analysis, with 2,842 complaints to Ford and NHTSA. The investigation now covers 2011-2017 Explorers. There is still nothing in the public file to indicate what information has been provided. Nonetheless, the media continues to report on the problem. The latest story capturing the dilemma for drivers sickened by their Ford Explorers with no relief was published by Bloomberg News late last month. Ford continues to insist that nothing is wrong.

Second row seating problems in the Honda Odyssey are now on the Watch List for the sixth consecutive quarter – but only one model, the 2016 model year made the Safety Watch List, climbing into third place. 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. There were repeated complaints about the unavailability of recall repair parts, but the most recent complaint to NHTSA was in April 2018, so perhaps the recall repairs have caught up with defect.

Toyota Sienna minivans with a power sliding door defect made the Safety Watch List for the third consecutive quarter, with the 2013 model year ranked 15th and the 2009 Sienna occupying the 13th position. In November 2016, Toyota recalled 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." Owners continue to complain into the last quarter of 2018 about sliding door malfunctions.

Unintended braking problems associated with the forward collision feature that is a part of Subaru's EyeSight Driver Assist Technology, returns to the Watch List. The 2016 Subaru Outback and the 2015 Forrester, has claimed the 10th and 11th spots respectively. The most recent NHTSA Vehicle Owner Questionnaire is from a 2015 Forrester owner, lodged in late February. Driver's report the dashboard icons for EyeSight and other systems suddenly illuminating, followed by driving problems.

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 many other parts/components/systems that could fail and potentially cause false activation.

The biggest mystery on the list is the 2013 Toyota Avalon in the second spot for an unknown problem. There have been some complaints about sagging headliners, but the most recent NHTSA VOQs of in the unknown or other category are from 2017. The Toyota Tacoma, 8th on the list for exterior lighting issues, garnered no corresponding complaints. Once again, there are few clues to the presence of the 2017 Audi A4 for structure problems – even though this model is on the list for the third consecutive quarter, now dropped down to 12th place on the Watch List. The 2017 Audi A4 also occupies the 12th spot for electrical problems. The few complaints to NHTSA do not point to any defect trends. The same for the 2015 and 2016 Volkswagen Golf which occupies the seventh and fourth spots, respectively, for a structure problem. There are a couple of exploding sun roof complaints, an issue which, in the past, has compelled Audi and Volkswagen to launch recalls, but not for these models.

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 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