

## **Takata Air Bag Update**

### **By ADR Staff**

The US Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued an amended order to continue the acceleration of recall repair for millions of US vehicle owners affected by the Takata air bag inflator recalls. The Amended Coordinated Remedy Order sets requirements for when automakers must have replacement parts available for customers and sets progress and completion deadlines for replacements of the defective parts which have been responsible for 11 deaths and approximately 180 injuries in the United States.

The amended order is intended to speed up the availability of replacement air bags and to continue to prioritize the highest risk vehicles to protect the traveling public. Under the order, Takata and the 19 affected automakers are required to obtain replacement parts on an accelerated basis and be made available first to the most at-risk vehicles. The order sets new requirements for automakers to certify to NHTSA when they have obtained a sufficient supply of replacement parts to begin repairs, and requires automakers to coordinate consumer messaging using pre-defined best practices. This action builds on the Coordinated Remedy Program initiated in November 2015, incorporating the additional tens of millions of inflators recalled or scheduled for future recall since that date, most of which were included in the May 2016 recall expansion.

There are currently 46 million recalled Takata air bag inflators in 29 million vehicles in the United States. Under the Amended Consent Order issued to Takata in May 2016, automakers will be required to recall additional inflators over the next three years, ultimately affecting approximately 64 to 69 million inflators in 42 million total recalled vehicles. Ultimately all frontal Takata inflators using non-desiccated phase-stabilized ammonium nitrate (PSAN) will be recalled. The full of list of vehicles that are currently affected or will be affected by future Takata recalls is available online at <http://www.safercar.gov/rs/takata/takatalist.html>.

NHTSA is committed to seeking a 100 percent recall completion rate from the vehicle manufacturers. As of December 2, 2016, automakers reported they have repaired approximately 12.5 million of the currently recalled 46 million inflators.

### **Test Results**

Before establishing the schedule for the expanded Takata inflator recalls announced in May 2016, NHTSA and its independent expert reviewed the findings of three independent research organizations into the Takata air bag ruptures and confirmed the findings on the root cause of inflator ruptures. A combination of time, environmental moisture and cycling high temperatures contribute to the degradation of the ammonium nitrate propellant in the inflators. Such degradation can cause the propellant to burn too quickly, rupturing the inflator module and sending shrapnel through the air bag and into the vehicle's cabin. The environmental moisture risk factor prompted NHTSA to determine that faulty air bags in vehicles originally sold or ever registered in geographic areas of high absolute humidity (HAH) were most susceptible to

catastrophic failure. The HAH area includes, in part, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

NHTSA is prioritizing Takata air bag repairs to ensure that vehicles with air bags that pose a higher threat to safety are fixed first while simultaneously working to ensure that parts are available to repair every affected vehicle as quickly as possible. Based on the test results regarding age and environmental conditions, NHTSA has ordered manufacturers to replace inflators in older vehicles that are most likely to have been exposed to hot and humid conditions first. Additional factors, such as whether the inflator is in a driver or passenger side air bag, factor into how a vehicle's repair is prioritized.

### **Higher Risk Vehicles**

Test data on a particular subset of defective Takata air bag inflators in certain model-year 2001-2003 Honda and Acura vehicles show a far higher risk of ruptures during air bag deployment, prompting NHTSA to place particular emphasis on the repair of these vehicles. The higher-risk inflators are in certain 2001-2003 Honda and Acura vehicles:

- 2001-2002 Honda Civic
- 2001-2002 Honda Accord
- 2002-2003 Acura TL
- 2002 Honda CR-V
- 2002 Honda Odyssey
- 2003 Acura CL
- 2003 Honda Pilot

US Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx urges people to not drive recalled vehicles in this particular subset “unless they are going straight to a dealer to have them repaired immediately.” The recalled vehicles in this subset have as high as a 50 percent chance of a dangerous air bag inflator rupture if the vehicle is involved in a crash. Ruptures are far more likely in inflators in vehicles that have spent significant periods of time in areas of high absolute humidity – particularly Florida, Texas, other parts of the Gulf Coast, and Southern California.

The vehicles in question were recalled between 2008 and 2011. Honda has reported that more than 70 percent of this higher-risk population of vehicles has already been repaired, but approximately 313,000 vehicles with this very dangerous defect remain unrepaired. Nine of the eleven confirmed US fatalities due to Takata ruptures were in this population of vehicles. The most recent occurred in Riverside County, California, when a 50-year-old female died after sustaining injuries in a crash on September 30, 2016.

### **NHTSA Guidance**

Because of the sheer number of vehicles involved in the Takata air bag recall, and because of Oklahoma's proximity to parts of the high humidity region, vehicles with air bags identified as being the most susceptible to failure can readily find their way into the fleet of used

vehicles in this state, and ultimately into used dealers' inventories. For consumers and for dealers holding Takata air bag recalled vehicles, NHTSA provides the following guidance.

- To see if the vehicle can be repaired now, use [NHTSA's Recalls Lookup Tool](#) on their website. If the vehicle can be remedied now, it will display in red the message that the recall is "incomplete." If the vehicle cannot be remedied now, it will display in red the message that the recall is "incomplete – parts not available."
- NHTSA recommends against disabling the recalled air bags while waiting for repair. NHTSA estimates that frontal air bags saved 2,400 lives in 2014 alone. They believe it is far more likely that, if the vehicle is involved in a crash, the air bag will perform properly and provide protection than that it will rupture and cause harm. An air bag that is purposely disabled has a 100-percent chance of failing to provide any protection in a crash.
- When faced with the question of whether to drive the vehicle or not, NHTSA notes that vehicles equipped with air bags, including air bags that are under recall, save lives and reduce injuries. NHTSA says, "The vast majority of Takata air bags will perform as expected." However, as a matter of policy, NHTSA does not accept even a small number of failures, and therefore is compelled to issue the recalls. NHTSA ultimately defers to the owner on the question of whether or not to continue driving the vehicle.
- Interim repairs are available for a limited number of vehicles. A small number of manufacturers are replacing older Takata inflators with newly manufactured versions of these same Takata inflators.
  - Even though these replacements will eventually need to be replaced as well, NHTSA recommends performing the interim repair if it is offered. The data NHTSA has collected unequivocally points to the age of the inflator as being a critical factor in the likelihood of rupture. An older inflator is more likely to rupture than a newer version of the same inflator. Therefore, replacing the older inflator with a newer version reduces the safety risk associated with the recalled vehicle until a final remedy inflator can be produced and installed. All owners that have an interim remedy applied will still be offered a free final remedy inflator and should be sure to have that repair done as well.
  - NHTSA notes that vehicles repaired on an interim basis will lose a certain priority for the permanent repair. Repairs are prioritized to reduce risk. A vehicle with the interim repair is considered to have a lower risk than an unrepaired vehicle. NHTSA believes it is better to receive the interim remedy in order to reduce the immediate risk. The permanent fix will still be offered. All vehicles with interim repairs are scheduled to be recalled for the final remedy no later than December 31, 2019.

A current list of affected vehicles, by priority group, for all 19 of the affected manufacturers is available for download on [NHTSA's Takata Air Bags](#) page.