

NY Police Agree Driver Error Caused Prius Crash

HARRISON, N.Y. (AP) — A housekeeper who reported that her boss' Toyota Prius accelerated on its own and wouldn't brake as she hurtled toward a stone wall apparently had her foot on the gas pedal the entire time, according to a police investigation that concluded the driver, not the car, caused the accident.

The March 9 crash in a suburban New York driveway came the day after a driver in San Diego reported that the gas pedal got stuck on his 2008 Prius, resulting in a wild 94 mph ride on a Southern California freeway.

The two accidents raised new questions about Toyota's accelerators. The company had already recalled more than 8 million cars over gas pedals that could become stuck or be held down by floor mats.

But in the California case, Toyota said its tests showed the car's gas pedal, backup safety system and electronics were working fine.

And on Monday, Harrison police Capt. Anthony Marraccini said, "The vehicle accelerator in this case was depressed 100 percent at the time of collision, and there was absolutely no indication of any brake application."

The data came from the car's on-board event data recorder and computer and was downloaded during an inspection Wednesday joined by Toyota and the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration, which also concluded the car was not at fault. The event data recorder, or "black box," is designed to record the state of the car at the moment of an impact.

Marraccini said the 56-year-old driver "believes she depressed the brake, but that just simply isn't the case here." She did not try to deceive police, he said, and she faces no charges.

Toyota spokesman Wade Hoyt said owner of Priuses can feel secure that "if you step on the brake they'll stop, even if the accelerator is glued to the floor."

The company also issued a statement saying it would continue to investigate "reported incidents of unintended acceleration."

The New York driver, identified as Gloria Rosel, did not come to the door of the house where she works Monday. Calls there were not returned.

Marraccini said the car's computers showed that the Prius' top speed down the driveway was 35 mph; it slowed once when it hit a curb and it was going 27 mph when it hit the wall across the street from the driveway entrance.

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The car's front end was wrecked but the driver was not seriously hurt.

The captain displayed a page from the computer readout that showed an accelerator sensor measuring 99.9 percent while a brake sensor showed zero. One critical finding, he said, was that although the throttle was fully open at the time of impact, the gas pedal returned to its normal position after the crash, indicating it did not stick.

Some consumer groups and safety experts have said the problems could be caused by faulty electronic throttles. Toyota has said it has found no evidence of problems with its electronics.

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Associated Press writer Ken Thomas in Washington contributed to this report.

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