

Ford Cracks Under Pressure, Recalls 150,000 F-150s

Ken Thomas, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under government pressure, Ford Motor Co. said Wednesday it will recall nearly 150,000 F-150 pickup trucks to fix air bags that could deploy without warning.

The recall covers trucks from the 2005-2006 model years in the United States and Canada for what the auto company calls a "relatively low risk" of the air bag deploying inadvertently.

The recall, however, is much smaller in scope than what the government had requested. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, citing 77 injuries, told the company in a November 2010 memo that the recall should cover 1.3 million F-150 trucks from the 2004-2006 model years.

The F-150 is the flagship of Ford's popular F-Series pickup trucks, the best-selling vehicle in America. The government expanded its investigation into the air bag problems in January 2010.

A Transportation Department spokeswoman said the agency was currently reviewing Ford's response to see if the recall was adequate. If the government determines that the recall is too limited, it could lead to a rare public hearing to decide whether Ford should expand its safety action.

NHTSA said in a Nov. 24 memo that it knew of 238 cases in which the air bags improperly deployed and noted that Ford made production changes to the trucks in 2006 and 2007 to fix the air bag wiring and other issues.

Government regulators said in the memo that Ford did not believe the issue "warrants any corrective action" because the number of reports and incidents were low, owners received "adequate warning" from the air bag warning light and the "resulting injuries are minor in nature."

Ford spokesman Wes Sherwood said in a statement Wednesday that the recall covered trucks built at the Norfolk, Va., assembly plant from November 2004 through June 2005.

Sherwood said the majority of the complaints involved trucks built during the first shift of production at the Norfolk plant and the rates of air bags accidentally deploying were much higher in trucks built at the Virginia plant than those built at plants in Michigan and Missouri.

Ford said an air bag wire located in the steering wheel could have been improperly

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positioned so it would chafe, expose bare copper and create the possibility of a short circuit that would light up the airbag warning lamp.

Ford said most of the air bag issues happened within the first few seconds of the vehicle starting up and the company said it was aware of "one customer that jumped from the vehicle" after the air bag deployed while the truck was parked in a driveway.

The recall, which was first reported by the Detroit News, is expected to begin in early March. Owners will be notified and told to bring their truck to their dealer.

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