Toyota Recalls Another 2.17 Million Vehicles In U.S.

Ken Thomas, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Toyota Motor Corp. recalled 2.17 million vehicles in the United States on Thursday to address accelerator pedals that could become entrapped in floor mats or jammed in driver's side carpeting, prompting federal regulators to close its investigation into the embattled automaker.

The Transportation Department said it had reviewed more than 400,000 pages of Toyota documents to determine whether the scope of the company's recalls for pedal entrapment was sufficient.

"As a result of the agency's review, (the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) asked Toyota to recall these additional vehicles, and now that the company has done so, our investigation is closed," said NHTSA administrator David Strickland.

Toyota has now recalled more than 14 million vehicles globally to fix gas pedals and other safety problems since 2009. The company has received intense scrutiny from the government since August 2009, when four people were killed in a high-speed crash involving a Lexus near San Diego.

U.S. regulators largely cleared the company earlier this month, saying that electronic flaws were not to blame for reports of sudden, unintended acceleration that led to hundreds of complaints. Transportation officials tied the problems to mechanical defects dealt with in recalls and "pedal misapplication," in which the driver stepped on the accelerator instead of the brakes. The company has, however, paid the U.S. government a record $48.8 million in fines for its handling of three recalls.

The world's No. 1 automaker has tried to move beyond the recalls, vowing to heed customer complaints and upgrade its safety technology. The company has installed on new vehicles brake override systems, which automatically cut the throttle when the brake and gas pedals are applied simultaneously, and created engineering teams to examine vehicles that are the subject of consumer complaints.

In its latest safety action, Toyota said more than half of the vehicles under recall were being added to a massive 2009 recall that fixed gas pedals getting trapped in the floor mat.

The Japanese automaker said it would add three models to the 2009 pedal entrapment recall: about 600,000 4Runner SUVs from the 2003-2009 model years; 761,000 RAV4 compact SUVs from the 2006-2010 model years; and 17,000 Lexus LX 570s from the 2008-2011 model years.

Toyota spokesman Brian Lyons said the additional pedal entrapment recalls were "based on our continued constructive dialogue with NHTSA. While our actions up to now have led to a substantial reduction in reports of acceleration concerns, we mutually agreed that Toyota would take these additional steps to help ensure that acceleration concerns are further reduced."

The recall also includes 372,000 RX 330, RX 350 and RX 400H vehicles from the 2004 through early 2007 model years and 397,000 2004-2006 Toyota Highlander SUVs and hybrid versions to replace floor carpet covering and retention clips on the driver's side that could interfere with the accelerator pedal arm.

Toyota also recalled 20,000 2006 through early 2007 GS 300 and GS 350 all-wheel drive vehicles to change the shape of a plastic pad embedded in the driver's side floor carpet that could cause pedal interference.

Lyons said the company was unaware of any accidents or injuries related to the new recalls. NHTSA said it had not confirmed any deaths or injuries associated with the latest recalls.

Toyota still faces dozens of lawsuits from owners. NHTSA has received about 3,000 reports of sudden acceleration incidents involving Toyota vehicles during the past decade, including allegations of 93 deaths. NHTSA, however, has confirmed five of them.

The company said owners of the recalled GS 300 and GS 350 vehicles will be notified of the recall in early March. Owners of the RX and Highlander vehicles will be notified in the "near future" and receive a second notification once replacement covers are available.

Owners of the recalled 4Runner, LX 570 and RAV4s will also receive an initial notification in the near future, followed by a second notification once the recall preparations are complete.

The company has posted detailed information at www.toyota.com/recall or www.lexus.com/recall. Owners can call Toyota at (800) 331-4331 or Lexus at (800) 255-3987.

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