

GM To Offer Center Air Bag In 2012

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors Co. said Thursday it will install a center air bag on three of its models next year to better protect drivers and front-seat passengers.

The new bag inflates from the right side of the driver's seat and is designed to protect people when their vehicles are hit on the opposite side of where they are sitting. They serve as a cushion between a driver and front-seat passenger in a collision, GM said in a statement.

The bags will come standard on all Buick Enclave crossover vehicles starting in the 2013 model year, and they'll be on the Chevrolet Traverse and GMC Acadia crossovers that are equipped with power seats. The 2013 models will come out in the fall of 2012. Crossovers are like SUVs but are more efficient because they're built on car underpinnings rather than trucks.

GM said in the statement that the center air bags, developed with parts supplier Takata Corp., are the first in the industry. It has plans to put them in more of its models, but the company would not say which ones.

GM said it analyzed the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's database of fatal auto accidents and found that crashes on the opposite side of where people sit accounted for 11 percent of deaths in non-rollover crashes from 2004 through 2009. The company said it checked crashes involving passengers wearing seat belts in vehicles from the 1999 model year or newer models.

The center air bag also is expected to help protect passengers in rollover crashes, the company said.

Shares of GM rose 11 cents to \$20.52 in morning trading. They are down 38 percent from the November initial public offering price of \$33 per share.

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