

# Air Bag Victim's Lawyer Questions Honda Recall Scope

Yuri Kageyama, AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Georgia college student Kristy Williams was almost killed when a metal piece flew out of an air bag in her 2001 Honda Civic — a traumatic accident her lawyer says might have been avoided had there been an earlier, more comprehensive recall.

Williams had even arranged to get her air bag fixed. But the appointment was a week too late.

The recalls at Honda Motor Co. for defective air bags that may inflate with too much pressure and send pieces of metal and plastic flying now affect some 2 million vehicles around the world.

Tragically for Williams, although recalls for air bags began in November 2008, her vehicle wasn't included until last year's batch.

The Tokyo-based automaker has now issued five recalls for defective air bags — the latest just this month for 304,000 vehicles globally, including the popular Accord, Civic, Odyssey, Pilot, CR-V and other models manufactured in 2001 and 2002.

There have been 20 accidents related to the problems, including two deaths in the U.S. in 2009, according to Honda.

"This is a serious, basic problem," Williams' attorney Leigh May said in a telephone interview.

Honda should have made the recalls encompassing, and her client might not have gotten hurt if it had, she said.

"It's so terrible. Air bags are supposed to be there to protect you. And, if the air bag is a mechanism of your injury, that's just not right," May told The Associated Press.

Honda and Williams settled for an amount that cannot be disclosed as a condition of their agreement, May said.

On April 2 last year, Williams was stopped at a traffic light when the driver and passenger air bags deployed without there being a crash.

Flying shrapnel severed her neck artery. She was in intensive care for two weeks, required several surgeries and suffered strokes. Luckily, she survived.

"It was really hard to get things together when I was released from the hospital.

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However, I am a determined individual and put my mind to finishing school," Williams, 25, said in an email.

"I want others to be aware of the consequences of not getting the recall seen about ASAP," she said.

Atlanta-based Butler, Wooten & Fryhofer, where May is a partner, is among a handful of U.S. law firms that won in suing Honda over the air bags.

May said it was unclear what Honda knew when, and why all the vehicles weren't recalled the first time as the problem air bags came from one supplier, Takata Corp.

Honda spokesman Hajime Kaneko confirmed the recalled air bags came from the one supplier. Takata declined comment.

As it played out, the recalls grew almost piecemeal, from the first recall in 2008, to include more models in two separate recalls in 2009, and again last year, and then this month.

Honda said the causes were different — the use of incorrect material in the chemical used to deploy the air bags in the latest recall and excessive moisture in the inflator propellant, which is part of what inflates the air bag, in earlier ones.

Honda, a reputed pioneer in air-bag technology, also expanded the recall to account for a possibly defective stamping machine during production.

"I can only say we are extremely sorry," said Kaneko. "It is our responsibility we failed to identify a problem part in our products."

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