

# Enterprise Backs Recall Oversight

Jim Salter, Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Enterprise Rent-A-Car now says it will support legislation to increase federal oversight of how car rental firms manage safety recalls for vehicles in their fleets.

Consumer groups have been pushing for the additional oversight, spurred in part by a 2004 accident in California in which sisters Raechel and Jacqueline Houck died in a Chrysler PT Cruiser rented from a branch of St. Louis-based Enterprise, the nation's largest car rental company. The car had been under recall for a power steering problem, and Enterprise had not repaired the problem.

A jury awarded \$15 million to the Houck family two years ago. Since then, the parents of the Houck sisters have advocated for stricter government oversight. Meanwhile, more than 170,000 people signed an online protest of Enterprise's policy on handling recalls posted on Change.org.

Enterprise said in a statement Thursday that it and other rental companies have made significant improvements in the process of inspecting and fixing recalled vehicles in the years since the 2004 accident. Still, Sen. Charles Schumer of New York and Sen. Barbara Boxer of California, both Democrats, have been seeking greater government oversight through a bill that, among other things, gives the National Highway Safety Administration authority over rental company practices.

"In the past, we believed that this step was unnecessary, but a growing number of people, including our customers and business partners, clearly want more assurance on this critical issue," Enterprise said. "We hear them — and what we've heard has caused us to rethink our stance."

But Enterprise stopped short of specifically endorsing the Schumer-Boxer bill that could receive an initial vote soon. Earlier this week, Hertz agreed to support the measure.

Cally Houck, the mother of the two young women killed in 2004, posted on Facebook: "While Enterprise's announcement today is a step in the right direction, what is more revealing is what Enterprise did not say. The question remains: 'Yes or no, will Enterprise support specific legislative language endorsed by Hertz, consumers, and 130,000 other people?' Anything less than yes would make today's announcement pure spin."

Enterprise pledged collaboration with those "committed to legislative oversight of the recall process."

Raechel Houck, 24, and Jacqueline Houck, 20, rented the PT Cruiser at an Enterprise branch in Capitola, Calif. A month before, the branch had been informed that the

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vehicle was under a safety recall for a faulty power steering hose that could leak and ignite on the catalytic converter, causing a fire.

No repairs were made. An attorney for the Houck family said the vehicle was rented four times while under recall before it was rented to the sisters, who died in a fiery head-on crash with an 18-wheeler near King City, Calif., on Oct. 7, 2004.

Enterprise said consumers can be assured that safeguards have been put into place to ensure that its vehicles meet the highest safety standards. The company said it is "profoundly sorry" for the accident that killed Raechel and Jacqueline Houck.

"Given all the changes and improvements we have made since that fatal crash, today that vehicle would never be rented," Enterprise said.

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