U.S. Expands Toyota Fire Probe To 1.4M Autos

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DETROIT (AP) — The government has expanded an investigation into fires that can start in the doors of several Toyota models, adding 600,000 Camrys and other vehicles to the probe.

The investigation now includes 1.4 million cars and SUVs from the 2007 to 2009 model years. When the probe began in February, it involved more than 800,000 Camrys and RAV4 SUVs from the 2007 model year.

Certain Camrys from the 2008 and 2009 model years, as well as some 2007 to 2009 Yaris subcompacts and all 2008 Highlander Hybrid SUVs, have been added to the investigation, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said on its website Monday. The vehicles were built from September of 2006 through August of 2008, the safety agency said.

So far, Toyota and the government have received 161 complaints of fires involving the vehicles. Nine people have been hurt, according to government documents.

All the vehicles use the same power window switch in the driver's door. The switches can overheat and cause fires, the government said.

NHTSA opened a preliminary inquiry into the fires earlier in the year, and upgraded it to a full engineering analysis on Thursday. An engineering analysis can lead to a recall, but so far there haven't been any.

Toyota's Camry midsize sedan is the most popular car in the U.S., and the RAV4 small SUV also is a big seller.

Messages were left Monday with a Toyota spokesman at the company's Torrance, California, U.S. headquarters.

Toyota's reputation has taken a hit over the past three years due to a string of huge recalls that ballooned to more than 14 million vehicles worldwide. Millions were recalled for acceleration problems, and Toyota replaced floor mats that can trap gas pedals and pedal assemblies that can stick and cause cars to take off by surprise. But after an exhaustive probe, U.S. safety regulators, aided by NASA engineers, found nothing wrong with Toyota's electronic throttle controls.

In December, the 2012 Camry received a five-star safety rating from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the agency's top rating.

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