

Feds Probe Jeep, Ram Models For Safety Problems

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DETROIT (AP) — Chrysler's two top-selling vehicles, the Ram pickup and the Jeep Grand Cherokee SUV, are under investigation by a government agency for safety problems.

The rear wheels can lock up in Rams from the 2009 and 2010 model years, potentially causing crashes, while power steering fluid hoses can leak in 2012 Grand Cherokees, possibly causing engine fires, according to documents posted Monday on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website.

The investigations affect up to 230,000 Ram pickups and nearly 107,000 Grand Cherokees. The pickup is Chrysler's top-selling vehicle this year, while the Grand Cherokee is No. 2. The government could make the company recall the vehicles, although no recalls have been required yet. Chrysler says it's cooperating with NHTSA and takes customer complaints seriously.

The safety agency said it opened the investigation after getting a dozen complaints from Ram owners about locking wheels. Gears that allow the wheels to turn at different speeds can fail, causing the wheels to freeze while the trucks are moving, the agency said.

In eight of the complaints, drivers reported they were traveling 35 mph or faster. In four others, drivers were traveling at higher speeds when the wheels locked, causing them to lose control, the agency said. In one case, a truck crashed into a concrete barrier. In another, the problem caused a truck's drive shaft to come loose and puncture the gas tank. No injuries were reported, the agency said.

The Ram is an important money maker for Chrysler Group LLC. The company sold almost 377,000 of the trucks in 2009 and 2010, but some of those sales were from other model years.

Chrysler spokesman Eric Mayne said any customers who are concerned about their vehicles should visit their dealers. He said the Ram and Grand Cherokee are extensively tested to ensure durability and safety.

On the Grand Cherokee, the agency says a hose can leak power steering fluid onto the engine, possibly causing fires. NHTSA said it opened an investigation that could involve nearly 107,000 of the SUVs.

The agency has received one report of power steering hose failure, and two reports of engine compartment fires while the Grand Cherokees were being driven. The fire complaints came in the past month, alleging severe engine blazes that destroyed

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the vehicles. The cause of the fires has not been determined, although in one case, a driver reported fluid dripping beneath the SUV during the incident, NHTSA said.

No one was hurt in the fires.

The Grand Cherokee, which was redesigned for the 2012 model year, has been a huge seller for Chrysler. Through June, the company sold more than 75,000 of the SUVs. Some 2012 models also were sold last year.

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