Toyota Recalls Pickups; Spare Tires Can Come Loose

The Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Toyota is recalling about 150,000 Tacoma midsize pickups in the U.S. because the spare tires can fall from beneath the trucks.

The recalled trucks from the 2001 to 2004 model years were sold or registered in 20 cold-weather states and Washington, D.C.

It's the latest in a string of safety recalls that have plagued the Japanese automaker in recent years. Earlier this month, Toyota recalled 2.77 million vehicles around the world, including the Prius hybrid and Corolla compact car, for water pump and steering shaft problems. In October, the company recalled 7.43 million vehicles for faulty power-window switches that can cause fires.

On the Tacomas, a plate used to hold the spare tire under the truck bed can rust after being exposed to road salt for a long time. In some cases, the plate can break and the tire can fall to the ground, Toyota said Wednesday in a statement. The plates weren't treated properly against corrosion, the company said.

The problem has caused two minor accidents and no injuries, Toyota spokesman Brian Lyons said. In each case a tire fell and struck a vehicle behind the pickups.

Dealers will inspect and may replace the plates at no cost to the owners. The company will start notifying owners by mail in December.

Toyota has been trying to fix its reputation after a series of massive recalls of 14 million vehicles over the last several years, mostly in the U.S., for unintended acceleration involving faulty floor mats, braking or gas pedals.

Before that, Toyota had boasted a reputation for pristine quality, centered around its super-lean production methods that empowered workers to hone in on quality control. Toyota executives have acknowledged the escalating recalls were partly caused by the company's overly ambitious growth goals.

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