

U.S. government weighs in on massive Ford recall

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The Associated Press

The U.S. government on Thursday warned owners of about 4.6 million recalled Ford vehicles to bring their cars and trucks immediately to dealerships to disconnect cruise control switch systems that have been linked to engine fires.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued the consumer advisory to the owners of certain unrepaired Ford, Lincoln and Mercury sport utility vehicles, pickup trucks, vans and passenger cars who have not yet responded to past recalls.

The recalls — which affect only vehicles sold in the United States — have vexed the Dearborn, Mich.-based automaker, affecting its popular F-Series pickup trucks and prompting hundreds of complaints and dozens of lawsuits over engine fires. Three deaths have been tied to the fires, and Ford has struggled to produce enough parts to fix the problem.

About 9.6 million Ford vehicles have been recalled since 1999 and about five million have been fixed, raising concerns about the remaining vehicles on the road. The traffic safety administration said it has received about 60 complaints of engine fires in the Ford vehicles since August 2007.

Ford said it supported the action and dealers would soon offer a more permanent fix.

"We absolutely want everybody to come in as soon as they can because we can eliminate the risk of fire for anyone with a vehicle in this recall," said Ford Motor Co. spokesman Wes Sherwood. He said the company would have an "ample supply" of the necessary replacement parts by June.

The traffic safety administration said many dealers will disconnect the cruise control switches as a "drive through" service so owners do not have to leave their vehicles at the dealership or schedule an appointment.

Replacement parts have not been widely available, so for now, vehicle owners should have the cruise control deactivated.

The traffic safety administration issued a lengthy list of older vehicles covered by the consumer advisory, including 1993-2004 Ford F150 trucks, 1994-2002 F250 through F550 Super Duty trucks with gasoline engines, and 1998-2001 Ford Explorer and Mercury Mountaineer SUVs, all of which were among the best-selling vehicles in the nation during those years.

A complete list was available at www.nhtsa.dot.gov

The Ford recalls have run into problems. Earlier this month, the automaker recalled about 225,000 vehicles that had already been repaired because they still appeared to be defective.

Ford also faces more than 100 lawsuits nationwide because of fires linked to the cruise control deactivation switch.

Last week, Ford was able to consolidate 77 lawsuits filed in Texas so a single judge can handle pretrial discovery.

Ford has said its internal investigations have found the fires did not cause deaths and injuries.

"In the cases where there was that allegation, we found that the source of the fire was unrelated to the vehicle," Ford spokeswoman Kristen Kinley said.

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