

GM says electric Volt is safe despite fires

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Visitors admire US auto giant General Motors' plug-in electric vehicle "Chevrolet Volt" in Yokohama, suburban Tokyo in May 2011. General Motors insisted Monday that its Chevrolet Volt is safe to drive despite the launch of a government probe after three of the Volt's electric batteries caught fire following safety tests.

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While there have been no reports of fires outside of government testing facilities, the probe calls into question the safety of electric vehicles at a time when consumers are just beginning to consider them as an alternative.

"New technologies are always held up to intense scrutiny. We welcome

it, we expect it," Mark Reuss, president of GM North America, said in a conference call.

Reuss called [electric vehicles](#) "our industry's moon shot" and insisted that customers have nothing to fear.

"Chevrolet and GM believe in the safety of the Volt," Reuss said.

"My daughter drives this car every day with two kids in it. She continues to drive it and loves it."

GM will nonetheless offer Volt customers a loaner vehicle until the investigation is complete.

The safety of electric batteries is an industry-wide issue and GM is working with federal regulators and other automakers to develop appropriate post-crash protocols, said Mary Barra, GM's senior vice president for global product development.

GM has teams ready to fly out to deal with the batteries whenever the vehicle's OnStar system reports a crash and believes that draining the power ought to eliminate the risk of fire, she said.

The National [Highway Traffic Safety](#) Administration also cautioned in announcing the probe Friday that "Volt owners whose vehicles have not been in a serious crash do not have reason for concern."

The investigation was launched earlier this month after a damaged [lithium battery](#) in a Volt caught fire three weeks after a [crash test](#).

The NHTSA sought to recreate the fire last week by intentionally damaging the battery compartment and breaking its coolant line. In two of the tests, the batteries caught fire, it said.

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