

GM adds two recalls; 2014 total above 8.5 million

May 15 2014, by Tom Krisher



General Motors added two recalls Thursday to its growing list for the year, pushing the total number of vehicles called back for fixes in 2014 to more than 8.5 million in the U.S. alone.

The company, which is in the midst of the largest recall crisis in its 105-year history, is recalling more than 140,000 Chevrolet Malibu midsize cars to fix a problem with the power-assisted brakes, plus

another 477 full-size pickup trucks for a steering problem.

The high number of GM recalls is pushing the U.S. auto industry toward a record-breaking year, and is an example of how automakers are moving far faster to fix problems than it has in the past in a bid to avoid bad publicity and record fines from government agencies.

Thursday's recalls brought GM's total for the year to 16, including 2.6 million small cars worldwide for a deadly ignition switch problem. The problem, which affects mainly older-model Chevrolet Cobalts and Saturn Ions, can cause the switches to slip out of the "run" position, shutting down the engine and disabling the power steering, brakes and air bags. That can cause drivers to lose control of the cars and crash. GM says the problem has caused 13 deaths, but trial lawyers suing the company say the death toll is at least 53.

GM has admitted knowing about the ignition switch problem for more than a decade, and that has brought investigations from two congressional committees, the Justice Department and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

It's also brought a shake-up at GM, with two top engineers leaving the company, two more suspended with pay and the appointment of a new safety chief who vowed to catch and fix problems far faster than in the past.



In this May 31, 2013 file photo, the 2014 Chevrolet Malibu is unveiled on Belle Isle in Detroit. General Motors is recalling more than 140,000 2014 Chevrolet Malibu midsize cars to fix a problem with the power-assisted brakes. The recall affects models with 2.5-liter four-cylinder engines and stop-start technology that shuts off the engine at red lights. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio, File)

Jeff Boyer, the new safety chief, said in an interview with The Associated Press that the company is looking at cases that were under review in its system and moving to resolve them as quickly as possible. GM, he says, has added 35 people to its recall review team.

"We're not waiting for warranty trends to develop over time," Boyer said. "It's not only about frequency, it has to be about the seriousness of the potential defect as well."

The largest of Thursday's recalls, covering more than 140,000 Chevrolet Malibu midsize cars from 2014, is an example of how GM is moving faster to issue recalls. The recall covers cars with 2.5-liter four-cylinder engines and stop-start technology that shuts off the engine at red lights.

GM says a software problem in the brake control computer can disable the power brakes. That means drivers would have to push the brakes harder to stop, and stopping distances would increase. Dealers will update the software at no cost to owners. GM will mail letters to owners starting around May 30.

GM found the problem while testing a new model that hasn't come out yet. The Malibu has a similar brake control system.

In the past, the company likely would have notified dealers that the Malibu could have a problem, but it would have waited for warranty claims and crash complaints to rise before issuing a recall.

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