

Top physicist probes unintended acceleration after recalls

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Toyota cars are lined up for sale at a Toyota dealership in Santa Monica, California in February 2010. A prominent US physicist will lead a panel aiming to identify possible causes of unintended acceleration in vehicles on the heels of widespread problems that led Toyota to issue mass recalls.

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Louis Lanzerotti, a New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) physics professor with experience in the space and atmospheric areas, will lead a team of 12 other experts seeking to shed light on the problem which rocked the world's biggest carmaker this year.

The study is part of the government's effort to understand what led to the recall of more than eight million Toyotas because of sudden unintended acceleration.

The experts, called together by the National Research Council, will begin meeting June 30 in Washington.

Lanzerotti has extensive research experience in space plasmas, geophysics and engineering problems related to the impacts of atmospheric

and space processes, and the space environment on space and terrestrial technologies.

At least 89 deaths have been linked to public complaints of unintended acceleration in [Toyota](#) vehicles, the US government has said.

A federal judge in California last month ordered the Japanese auto giant to turn over thousands of documents on its vehicles' problems with sudden unintended acceleration at a hearing for a class action suit.

More than 200 federal and some 100 state cases have been filed against the world's leading carmaker for alleged [design flaws](#) dating back to 2002, when a [computerized system](#) was installed to manage acceleration. The federal cases have been consolidated into one class action case.

Toyota has pulled around 10 million vehicles worldwide since late last year for safety issues and has paid a record fine of 16.4 million dollars to settle claims that it hid gas pedal defects blamed for dozens of deaths.

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