

9.4 Million Vehicles Recalled In 1971

More than 9.4 million vehicles were recalled by manufacturers in 1971 for correction of possible safety defects, according to figures about to be released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. This was an increase of more than 8 million over the 1970 total of 1.2 million.

The defect campaigns by which the vehicles were recalled totalled 235, an increase of 81 over the number of campaigns conducted in 1970. Of the 235 campaigns, the safety administration claims to have prompted 52. The others were initiated by manufacturers. However, the 52 NHTSA-urged campaigns involved 8.3 million of the 9.4 million vehicles recalled in 1971. (The safety administration, prodded by Ralph Nader and syndicated columnist Bob Irvin, urged General Motors to recall 6.7 million vehicles for motor mount modification in December 1971.)

According to a list just released, the safety administration is currently investigating 57 possible defects in motor vehicles and motor vehicle equipment. The investigations are divided into groups labelled "Priority I" and "Priority II." According to Joseph H. Clark, Jr., the safety administration's chief of defect investigations, the agency assigns priorities to its investigations based on the suspected defect's "hazard to traffic safety" and "consumer interest."

In July 1971, spurred by Nader-affiliated investigators, the agency for the first time published a list of its on-going defect investigations. Lists now are updated monthly; they include only the make, model, model year and the vehicle component under investigation.

The list fails to characterize the nature of suspected defects. For example, "case 266" involves an investigation of the "ignition switch" on 1969 "full size" Fords. The safety administration refuses to disclose what it suspects is wrong with the ignition switch.

More details on suspected defects may appear in subsequent lists, including dates when investigations were initiated, information on the number of cars potentially affected, and a description of the

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Editor's Note: Beginning this issue, Status Report will publish, on a quarterly basis, NHTSA's list of defect investigations along with notations of investigations that have been initiated or discontinued during that quarter.

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suspected defect, according to defect investigations chief Clark. He told *Status Report* that such information is not publicly available at this time because "the position of the administration right now is that there is not value in putting out a lot of detail because this invites a concern that may not be warranted." However, he added, it "may develop that this information will become available in the future."

In a recent letter, Safety Administrator Douglas Toms told Ralph Nader that NHTSA depends on consumers, consumer groups, multidisciplinary investigation teams, its own regional offices, state administrators and other agencies in government to contribute information on possible safety defects. He also mentioned automotive diagnostic centers and insurance companies as possible sources of information. "I am requesting my organization to explore promptly a practical means for individual vehicle owners to communicate possible safety defect information directly to NHTSA," Toms told Nader.

At the present time the safety administration's 25-member defect investigation staff uses "consumer protection bulletins" to "invite" information from vehicle owners, according to Clark. These are issued "when we reach the point (in an investigation) where it seems important to go out with a statement of use risk At that point we are eager to get the (public's) input."

NO RECALL AUTHORITY

The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 (Sec.113) establishes basic requirements for defect notification campaigns once a defect has been found to exist. The Congress stopped short in the Act of giving NHTSA authority to require manufacturers to recall and repair defective vehicles or vehicle equipment at their own expense, although this has been done voluntarily in most cases. The agency's power is limited to requiring manufacturers to notify consumers when safety related defects are discovered.

Safety Administrator Toms has said in recent congressional testimony that his agency should have authority to force recalls because "we think it is necessary (in order) to do our job."

Senators Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisc.) and Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.) have introduced legislation (S. 2946) that would require manufacturers to recall and pay for correction of all safety related defects instead of just notifying consumers that a defect exists.

NHTSA has also tightened its own rules on defect campaigns. The new rules, which became effective Aug. 16, 1971, require manufacturers to submit "defect information reports" to the agency when a defect is discovered, and quarterly reports on recall campaign progress. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 6, No. 4, March 1, 1971.)

According to Clark, manufacturers are given a "reasonable period of time" after defects are discovered to notify consumers. He says that manufacturers' interpretations of what constitutes a "reasonable period of time" have "varied more than they should." The safety administration is studying changes that would speed the consumer notification process once a defect is discovered. However, "All of the ramifications haven't been worked out yet," he said.

One obstacle in the way of prompt notification is that "it takes time" for manufacturers to distribute parts and information to dealers in order to prepare them for a campaign, Clark said.

Complaints of suspected safety related defects should be sent to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Defects Investigation, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20591. *Status Report* requests that a copy of the letter be sent to "Defects", Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Suite 300, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037. Letters should contain the make, model and model year of the vehicle, the date purchased, vehicle identification number, vehicle mileage and a description of the defect.

**Subjects Of Current NHTSA
Safety-Related Defect Investigations**

Priority I

January 31, 1972

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT
258	American Motors, Checker, Chrysler, Ford, General Motors	All Models	1965-1969	Engine Mounts
161	American Motors, Chrysler, Ford, General Motors	All	1963-1971	Power Brake Vacuum Check Valves
297	Firestone	Front Tires on GMC Parcel Delivery Vans 4903 and 4905	1969-1970	Tires
098	Ford	Mustang, Mercury	1966-1970	Ford Drop in Fuel Tank Vents
140	Ford	Mustang, Cougar	1968-1969	Seat Back Pivot Arms
212	Ford	Full Size	1965-1969	Lower Control Arms
266	Ford	Full Size	1969	Ignition Switches
282	Ford	Standard Size	1965-1970	15x5 Wheels
282.b	Ford	Ford Sedan	1968-1971	15x6.5 Wheels
287	Ford	Galaxie	1968-1969	Front Wheel Spindles
279	General Motors	Corvair	1960-1963	Handling and Stability
252	General Motors	½-Ton Van and Passenger Cars	1969	Tie Rods
132	General Motors	All	1965-1966	Quadrajets Carburetors
249.b	Volkswagen	Volkswagen	Pre-1963	Heaters
278	Volkswagen	All	1965-1971	Seats and Seat Tracks
228	Volvo	140, 164, P-1800	1969	Accelerator Linkages

(Cont'd. on page 4)

Priority II

January 31, 1972

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT
190	All Manufacturers	Travel Trailers	1965-1970	Wheels, Axles and Tires
C2-09	All Manufacturers	All	All	Motorcycle Helmets
C2-05	American Motors	Jeepster	1971	Service Brakes
C2-13	Army M151 Jeep	M151	All	Handling and Stability
C2-17	Aros Mfgr., Fife Metal Tacoma Wheel, Trailrite Trailer Co. and Wallstrong Mfgr.	Boat Trailers	Various	Axle Wheel Hubs
169	Bonanza	15', 17' Trailers	Various	Wheel Lug Bolts
289	British Leyland	Austin America, All Models	1971	Exhaust Systems
C2-15	British Leyland	MG Midget	1970	Master Cylinder Seals
150	Budd, Firestone and Kelsey-Hayes	Rh 5 ⁰ Wheels for Medium Trucks	Various	Wheels
264	Dodge	S500 Chassis	1964-1967	Brake Drums
128	Ford	16" Two-Piece Wheels for Light Trucks	Various	Wheels
265	Ford	All Models	1970-1971	Locking Pawl Grommet, Shoulder Harnesses
C2-06	Ford	Capri	1971	Evaporative Emission Systems

Priority II

January 31, 1972

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT
C2-24	Ford	Mustang	1966	Steering Shafts
C2-25	Ford	School Bus	1966	Brake Lines
C2-31	Ford	Standard Size	1971	Steering Tie Rods
C2-36	Ford	Capri, Cortina	1970-1971	Steering Wheels
C2-37	Ford	Standard Size	1969	Master Cylinders
209	General Motors	Chevrolet Biscayne	1969	Rear Track Bars
233	General Motors	GMC School Bus	1965-1970	Brake Wheel Cylinders
C2-20	General Motors	Oldsmobile Cutlass	1971	Service Brakes
C2-21	General Motors	Chevrolet	1965	Frames
C2-29	General Motors	Vega	1971-1972	Dash Panels
C2-32	General Motors	GMC, Chevrolet Pickup	Various	15", 16" Single Piece Wheels
C2-33	General Motors	Pontiac Firebird	1972	Lower B-Posts
C2-35	General Motors	Vega	1971	Throttle Solenoid Bracket Breakage
248	International Harvester	1600, 1700S, 1800 Bus	1958-1970	Brake Shoes
276	International Harvester	1200D	1970	Front Spring U-Bolts
C2-08	International Harvester	Step-n-Van	1970-1971	Steering Linkages

Priority II

January 31, 1972

CASE	MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT
283	International Harvester	Loadstar	1969	Rear Axle Housings
C2-23	Mack Trucks	Mack Truck Tractor	1969-1970	Front Suspension, Saddle Block and U-Bolts
C2-30	Mack Trucks	Various	Various	Rear Spring Retention
C2-10	Peterson Mfgr.	Model 63	All	Child Seating Systems
C2-18	Rockwell Standard	Various Trucks	1970-1971	Front Axle Hubs
C2-19	Rockwell Standard	Tandem Axle Trailers	1960-1963	Axle Spindles
C2-34	Toyota	Celica	1972	Accelerator and Linkage Systems
060	Volkswagen	All	1958-1969	Windshield Wiper Arms
C2-28	Warner Electric Brake Company	Various	Various	Electric Brakes
307	Western Unit Corp.	Butler Trailers	Various	Drawbars and Dollybars
C2-22	White Motor Corp.	903 V8 Engine Truck-Trailer	Various	Accelerator Return Springs
296	Various	Various	Various	Torque Arms

Data Dispute GM, DOT Back Bumper Claims

Analysis of approximately 50,000 closed auto insurance claims has disclosed that automobile rear ends are more frequently damaged in collisions than has been contended by auto manufacturers and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

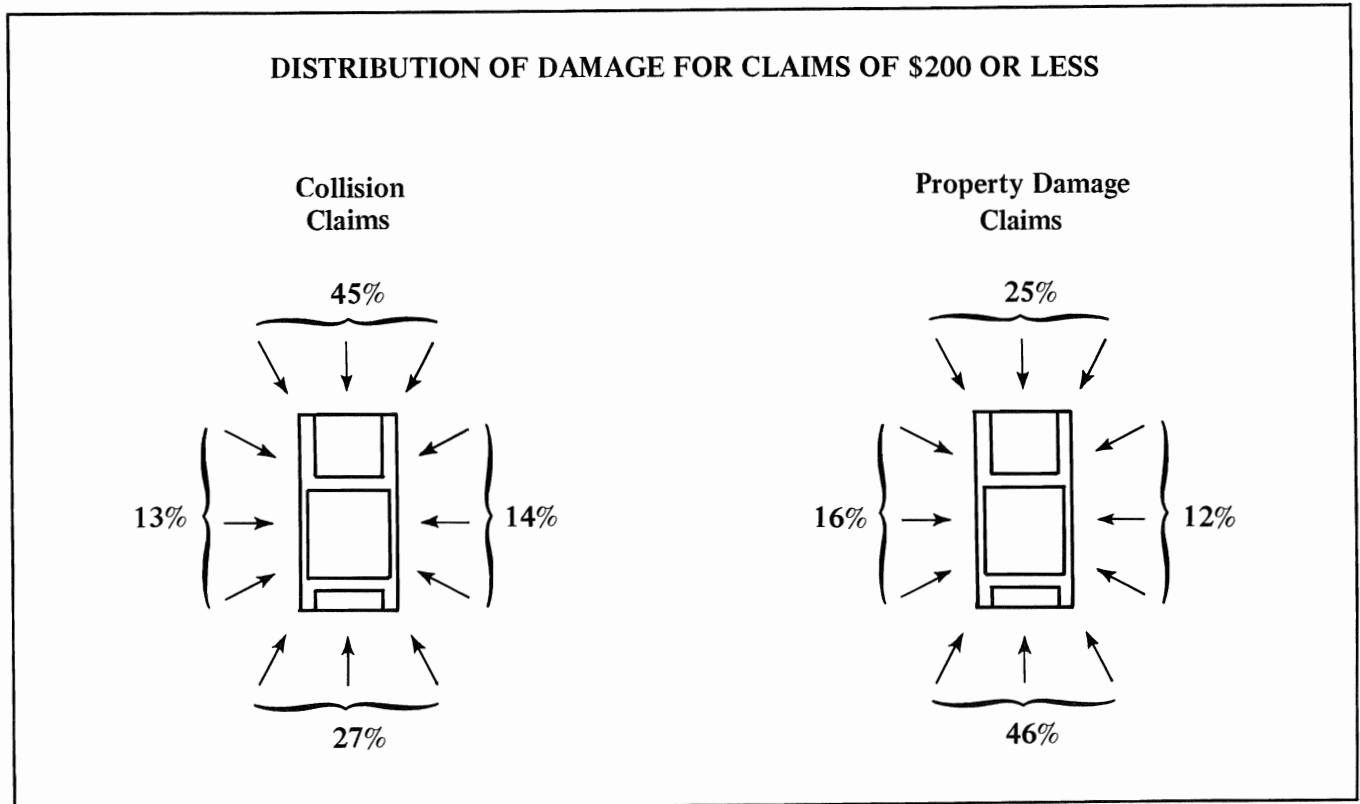
General Motors has stated that, based on a study of 13,000 cases in files of its subsidiary, Motors Insurance Company, the front ends of cars are two and a half times more likely to be damaged in crashes than are rear ends. GM has used this argument in support of its position that performance standards for rear bumpers should be less strict than those for front bumpers in providing protection against low-speed crash damage.

At a 1971 press conference announcing the NHTSA's "bumper" standard, Safety Administrator Douglas Toms also claimed that "there are fewer hits on the rear" but said the agency could not support such a contention with "good, reliable statistical information that will hold up." The standard for 1973 model cars sets a 5 mile per hour crash test requirement for front bumpers but only a 2.5 mile per hour crash test for rear bumpers.

GM's insurance claim study was based solely on collision coverage data since its subsidiary does not sell liability coverage. Such a sampling, involving mostly damage to striking cars rather than struck cars, is misleading because:

- It excludes most vehicles struck by others in crashes;
- It excludes many low-damage crashes simply because such insurance coverage is almost always written with "deductible" clauses, and crashes with damages less than the deductible level do not result in claims to the insurance company;

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● It excludes many old cars since collision coverage is frequently dropped after the first few years of car use.

Allstate Insurance Company conducted surveys of about 49,000 crash claims. These were all of the claims closed by Allstate during February and August of 1970. Its sample of closed claims included both collision coverage and property damage (liability) coverage.

Considering only collision claims, Allstate's data are comparable to GM's: for every 10 claims involving rear-end damage there were 22 with front-end damage.

But in the lower ranges of such claims—those below \$200—the incidence of front-end damage declined to 16 for every 10 claims involving rear-end damage. (Fifty-one per cent of all collision coverage claims in the sample were for amounts less than \$200.)

When non-deductible, property damage insurance claims were considered, the incidence of rear-end damage was higher than that for front-end damage. Considering all property damage claims, there were only 6 involving front-end damage for every 10 involving rear-end damage. For those claims under \$200 (69 per cent of all property damage claims in the sample) there were only five involving front-end damage for every 10 involving rear-end damage. In other words, at the lowest levels of property damage claims, the rear ends of vehicles were twice as often damaged as were front ends.

The charts on page 7 illustrate the incidence of damage to fronts, rears and sides of vehicles for each category of claim closures for \$200 or less in the Allstate sample.

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