

## 12 Million Defective Vehicles Recalled Last Year

1972 was the biggest year yet for motor vehicle recalls. In 320 defect notification campaigns, manufacturers of cars, trucks and tires recalled 12,081,803 vehicles and tires.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration played a role in influencing 94 of those recalls, involving 8,310,170 vehicles, according to figures supplied *Status Report* by agency officials. The rest were conducted on manufacturer initiative. The agency estimates that only 80 per cent of all cars recalled are ever repaired.

This issue of *Status Report* deals largely with safety related motor vehicle defects, and includes articles on possible defects that NHTSA is investigating, current efforts by the agency to increase the amount of information it gathers on potential defects and new rules by the agency to make sure manufacturers tell consumers exactly why their vehicles are being recalled when defects are found.

### AUTO CLUBS AID DEFECT SEARCH

NHTSA's defect investigation chief Andrew Detrick claims that the agency's program to enlist auto clubs in efforts to pinpoint defects is the "most effective thing we've come up with." Detrick told *Status Report* that he is "rather impressed" with the information the clubs have supplied in the nine cases in

which they've been involved since the program got under way five months ago. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 13, July 17, 1972.)

NHTSA's use of auto clubs began last year when the agency entered into agreements with clubs in Missouri and California. On request from the agency the clubs use their diagnostic facilities to check members' vehicles when NHTSA suspects that a defect exists in certain makes or models. Detrick declined to disclose specific investigations in which the clubs are participating.

He said that the agency would like to expand this program by finding an auto club in an area with periods of "long cold weather and salt sea atmosphere." NHTSA has been looking in the northeastern part of the country but, so far, has not been successful in finding an auto club that has the necessary diagnostic facilities, he said.

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## Defect Search Program Turns Up Collapsing Exhaust Pipes

NHTSA has recently warned Ford and General Motors about exhaust pipe failures discovered in cars they manufacture. The faulty tail pipes turned up in an NHTSA defect identification project that uses independent repair shops to look for potentially defective motor vehicle components.

Although the agency claims that the exhaust pipe failures are not safety related, it has asked that "responsible individuals" at the two auto makers determine whether "this type of exhaust pipe should be used in the future."

The exhaust pipe failures were discovered by NHTSA as a result of the agency's 20 month old "parts return program." The program, which involves over 300 independent repair shops, is designed to provide NHTSA with defect information on older vehicles that are no longer under warranty.

Defects investigation director Andrew Detrick told *Status Report* that the agency brought the failures to the manufacturers' attention because NHTSA "has an obligation not to sit on information it has received" on parts failures, even if the failures are not safety related, but concern an "area of customer satisfaction." Detrick said that this was the first time that NHTSA has sent such a letter. The NHTSA letter to the two companies said that since collapses of the inner walls of the so-called dual wall exhaust pipes "are not easily determined visually, they generally result in considerable puzzlement to mechanics attempting to determine the cause of decreased engine performance."

### EXHAUST PIPE BLOCKAGE PROHIBITED

According to NHTSA, its exterior protection standard is aimed at protecting safety related items. The standard singles out the exhaust system as one that may not be damaged under specific low speed crash test conditions. The standard (FMVSS 215) says, "The vehicle's exhaust system shall have no leaks or constrictions."

In describing the exhaust pipe failures, a "parts return program" report said that "the inner wall of these pipes collapsed and completely blocked the exhaust passage." Repair shops in the program were urged to check for the failures, since a collapsed exhaust pipe can "cause dangerous exhaust gas leakage in the engine area," according to a newsletter put out by the parts return program contractor. (Four Maryland loss reduction researchers have reported that more than 500 Americans may be dying each year from carbon monoxide poisoning in "vehicles that are defective due to deterioration, damage or poor automotive design." See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 9, May 8, 1972.)

Defects director Detrick told *Status Report* that his office had examined the dual wall exhaust pipe problem and concluded that it did not "warrant further investigation," because there was "no safety related involvement."

NHTSA also has taken action on four other items of equipment found by the "parts return program" to have "significant failure trends." It has:

- Opened an investigation into Ford master cylinder failures;
- Reopened a previously terminated investigation on power brake vacuum check valve failures (the reopened investigation covers American Motors, Chrysler, Ford and General Motors vehicles);
- Decided that Ford brake hose failures did not involve a safety-related defect;

- Renewed investigation of motor mount failures on Ford and Checker vehicles. (General Motors has already recalled 6.6 million vehicles for motor mount failures.)

Detrick told *Status Report* that he is "disappointed" with the limited success of the "parts return program." However, he added that it is, "too soon to expect dramatic results." Detrick explained that the program suffers from "short-lived enthusiasm" of some of the repair shops, none of which are paid for taking part in the program. They are "very good for a while but slowly drift away," Detrick said.

Although only participating repair shops are placed on the mailing list for the "parts return program" newsletter, which identifies significant parts failures found in the program, the public can obtain copies for a minimal charge from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Technical Reference Division, Room 5108, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

## NHTSA Opens Four, Closes Seven Defect Investigations

Since *Status Report* last published NHTSA's list of defect investigations (*Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 22, Nov. 27, 1972), the agency has initiated or reopened four investigations and completed seven others. Charts listing NHTSA's current defect investigations begin on page 7.

Significant investigations recently closed by NHTSA include:

- **Steering lock-up on 1971-1972 Chevrolets (case C2-40).** General Motors agreed to recall 3.7 million 1971-1972 Chevrolet, Buick, Oldsmobile and Pontiac models for installation of a gravel shield over the steering coupling. "The shield will prevent the possibility of flying stones lodging between the coupling and the frame of the car." GM said. This defect was first reported to NHTSA by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Feb. 12, 1973.)

- **Missing B-post welds on 1972 Pontiac Firebirds (case C2-33).** According to NHTSA, this case involved "the omission or partial omission of five spot welds on the body lock pillar of approximately 1,800 Pontiac Firebirds" built between October 14 through October 29, 1971, at the General Motors assembly plant in Norwood, Ohio. The "body lock pillar" is located immediately behind the front door. In deciding that no safety related defect was involved, NHTSA reasoned, "Although the absence of the alleged missing spot welds would cause some loss of side impact protection, it is quite probable that the Firebird [which has side door beams to resist intrusion] would still possess greater protection than the [Chevrolet] Nova/[Pontiac] Ventura body shell [which does not have side door intrusion beams], or many smaller foreign built automobiles." NHTSA said that the Nova/Ventura door design provides "relatively little resistance to side intrusion . . . ."

The following investigations were also closed after NHTSA determined that no defect exists:

- Power steering hose failures and resulting fires in the 1972 Ford LTDs (case C2-46);
- Wheel lug bolt failures in Bonanza trailers (case 169);
- Brake drum failures in 1964-1967 Dodge S-500D school buses (case 264);
- Excessive heat buildup in 1971 Oldsmobile Cutlass brakes (case C2-20);
- Ignition switch failures in 1969 Fords (case 266).

## NHTSA Tightens Defect Letter Rule

Under new NHTSA rules governing the contents of defect notification letters, auto manufacturers will have to give consumers increased information about the defects that may exist in their car.

### *Firestone Freedom*

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. wants to be free to tell consumers that tires aren't defective even after NHTSA has declared them so.

The tire maker claims that NHTSA's new defect notification rule "includes 'gag' provisions to which we take serious exception on Federal Constitutional grounds."

The provision which the tire maker claims is in violation of its "Federal Constitutional" rights, forbids manufacturers from making "any statement or implication" in its defect notification letters to consumers "that the problem discussed in the letter is not a defect, or that it does not relate to motor vehicle safety." Firestone has asked NHTSA to drop that provision from its rule.

John F. Floberg, vice president, secretary and general counsel of Firestone, told *Status Report* that his company views the "outrageous" provision as a "classic example of an abuse of bureaucratic authority."

NHTSA says the rules, which broaden the scope of information that manufacturers must include in their defect notification letters, are necessary because manufacturers in the past have taken "inadequate measures" to "alert car owners of possible dangers that exist when defects are found in motor vehicles or motor vehicle equipment." (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 13, July 17, 1972.)

Manufacturers are required by the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 to inform first purchasers and warranty holders by certified letter when safety related defects exist. The new regulation spells out, in detail, what those letters must tell consumers.

Among other things, the letters must include:

- A "description of the malfunction that might occur;"
- "Precautions, if any, that the purchaser should take to reduce the chance that the malfunction will occur before the vehicle is repaired;"
- A "general description" of the work necessary to repair the defect along with estimates of time and cost involved in the repair. (Cost estimates are not required if the manufacturer pays for the repairs.)

- Information on where and when repair parts will be available.

The safety administration says it received "many comments opposed" to the provisions that "prohibit the notification from stating or implying that the problem is not a defect, or that it does not relate to motor vehicle safety" or that "the manufacturer disagrees with the Administrator's finding" of defect. (NHTSA points out that if a manufacturer disagrees with the finding, it "can administratively and judicially challenge this determination . . . before sending a notification.")

"Notification letters are not intended to serve as forums where manufacturers can argue that

problems are not safety related or dispute the Administration's findings. Their purpose is to unambiguously and adequately induce owners to remedy a potentially hazardous situation," the agency said.

In its comments, Ford Motor Co. said that even though it is prohibited from making disclaimers in notification letters, "the public will be told explicitly or implicitly that the manufacturer does disagree [with the finding]. Since the news media still enjoys [sic] all of their constitutional rights, we are powerless to preclude this result."

Chrysler Corp., Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., Recreational Vehicle Institute, Inc., Wagner Electric Corp. and the Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association have petitioned NHTSA to change the new rule. The rule (Docket No. 72-7) was printed in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 38, No. 15, Jan 23, 1973.

## Magazine Finds World Of Highway Safety Off Axis

A national magazine has taken a close look at "highway safety" in America and found it wanting.

*World Magazine*, the general-circulation magazine started by publisher Norman Cousins last year, devotes most of its March 13 issue to a "central theme": that "25,000 lives could be saved this year in the United States — apart from 75,000 lives in the rest of the world — through existing automotive technology and the application of a little common sense."

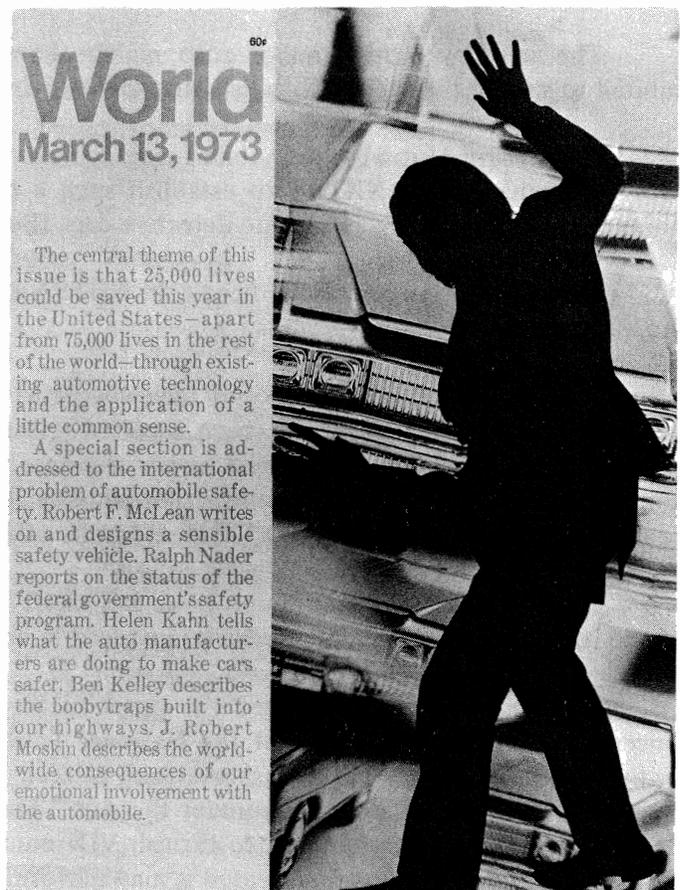
In a lead-off article, *World's* editor at large, J. Robert Moskin, singles out "four primary lines of attack" that he feels are being neglected by the so-called highway safety field:

*Car Safety*: "We are not going to stop the carnage until the car itself is safer and does not devour its occupants" in a crash. "Blame kids or carelessness or speed hunger," says Moskin, "but don't pass over the top-brass automobile manufacturers. They can build safer cars."

*Speed*: "Of course, we only tackle half of the speed problem. We post — and sometimes enforce — maximum speeds on our roads, but we continue to build cars that can go as much as fifty miles faster than those legal limits. It doesn't make much sense."

*Boobytraps*: "We spend billions on [building] our highways each year, but bad highways still kill. Tight curves, close-in abutments and poles, threatening guardrails, slippery surfaces, uncontrolled intersections.... The hazards are unending, but correcting them saves lives."

*Drunk Drivers*: "In 1969, Baton Rouge, Louisiana initiated a prearrest breath test with sixty days in jail for those who refused it. This project was developed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety chiefly to question the



constitutionality of prearrest screening tests. In most states you have to be arrested before a breath test can be required . . . . We are still being too nice to drunk drivers, and they kill.”

Other articles in the special issue include:

- “The Game of Deadly Numbers,” in which *World* staff writer Susan Heath questions the National Safety Council’s emphasis on “the death prediction business” and criticizes its “pile of slogans.”
- “Who Wants Safer Cars,” companion articles, by *Automotive News* correspondent Helen Kahn and attorney Ralph Nader, dissecting the reactions of the auto manufacturing industry and the federal government to public demands for increased auto safety.
- “Our Boobytrapped Highways,” an analysis by IIHS’s communications vice president, Ben Kelley, of the national roadside hazard problem and its readily available countermeasures.

*World Magazine* is located at 488 Madison Ave., New York 10022.

## **Auto Makers Split On NHTSA VIN Proposal**

The country’s three major auto makers have split 2-to-1 on NHTSA’s proposal that they be required to supply the agency with lists that identify defective cars by vehicle identification number.

State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co. Vice President Thomas C. Morrill and the Center for Auto Safety had asked NHTSA to establish such a requirement in order that insurance companies and others could help identify and locate defective cars. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 13, July 17, 1972.)

General Motors and Ford have told NHTSA they generally agree with the proposed requirement. Chrysler opposes it.

Both Ford and General Motors have suggested that the agency require auto makers to supply only the VIN’s for cars that have not been repaired within the first six months of a recall campaign. “Our experience indicates that the greatest owner response to a notification campaign occurs during the first six months. It is after the first six months that additional steps in locating those vehicles which have not been repaired would be most productive,” GM said in its official comment on NHTSA’s proposed rule.

Ford said it “believes this proposal has merit” and “is willing to provide the Administration with vehicle identification numbers of vehicles involved in notification campaigns.”

But Chrysler Corp. attacked the proposal as potentially “costly, ineffective and unfeasible to all concerned.” Chrysler claimed that the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 does not “authorize the Secretary [of Transportation] to seek VIN’s for purposes of enabling others to do what is already required of manufacturers under the Act.” The auto maker said in its comment to NHTSA that “it believes it should not be required to furnish VIN numbers [sic] in aid of a notification system that only one insurance company has represented it may perform but has not promised to perform.”

**Subjects of Current NHTSA  
Safety Related Defect Investigations**

Priority I March 12, 1973

| CASE   | MAKE   | MODEL   | YEAR      | COMPONENT                            | POSSIBLE PROBLEM                                   |
|--------|--|---|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 161    | <b>American Motors,<br/>Chrysler, Ford,<br/>General Motors</b> | All models  | 1963-1971 | Power brake vacuum check valve       | No power assist with loss of valve cover           |
| C3-09  | B.F. Goodrich  | 7.35-14   | 1967-1971 | Space saver tire                     | Insufficient instructions for mounting tire on rim |
| C3-17  | British Leyland  | Triumph TR-6  | 1971-1972 | Fuel tank and filler neck connection | Leaks when filling tank                            |
| 150    | <b>Budd, Firestone,<br/>Kelsey-Hayes</b>                       | <b>RH5<sup>0</sup> Wheels for medium trucks</b>     | Various   | Wheel                                | Accidental explosive disassembly                   |
| 258.9* | Checker  | All models  | 1965-1969 | Engine mount                         | Secondary effects from shearing of engine mount    |
| C3-03  | Chrysler   | All full-size Chryslers, Dodges, Plymouths          | 1969-1972 | Bulkhead electrical connector        | Becomes disconnected                               |
| 297    | Firestone  | Front tires on GMC parcel delivery vans 4903 & 4905 | 1969-1970 | Front tire                           | Excessive heat buildup                             |
| 258.6* | Ford   | All models  | 1965-1972 | Engine mount                         | Secondary effects from shearing of engine mount    |
| C3-10  | Ford   | Lincoln Continental Mark IV                         | 1972      | Tie rod sleeve                       | Breakage   |
| C3-12  | Ford   | LTD Country Squire                                  | 1972      | Steering wheel nut                   | Lack of quality control during assembly            |

\*Initiated or reopened since November 17, 1972.

Bold face entries under NHTSA investigation two or more years.

## Priority I

| CASE  | MAKE           | MODEL  | YEAR      | COMPONENT                    | POSSIBLE PROBLEM   |
|-------|----------------|--|-----------|------------------------------|--|
| 98    | Ford           | Cougar,<br>Mustang                           | 1966-1970 | Drop-in fuel<br>tank vent    | Certain vents ex-<br>posed to rupture<br>by shifting luggage |
| 140   | Ford           | Cougar,<br>Mustang                           | 1968-1969 | Seat back<br>pivot arm       | Inboard pivot<br>failure                                     |
| 287   | Ford           | Galaxie                                      | 1968-1969 | Front wheel<br>spindle       | Fatigue crack in<br>heel area                                |
| 212   | Ford           | Full size                                    | 1965-1969 | Lower con-<br>trol arm       | Fatigue failure  |
| 128   | Ford           | Light trucks                                 | Various   | 16" two-<br>piece wheel      | Lock ring gutter<br>failure                                  |
| 215   | Goodyear       | KB-KW wheels<br>for medium &<br>heavy trucks | Various   | 20" two-<br>piece wheel      | Accidental explo-<br>sive disassembly                        |
| C3-11 | Cadillac       | All models                                   | 1959-1960 | Steering pit-<br>man arm     | Fatigue failure  |
| 209   | Chevrolet      | Biscayne                                     | 1969      | Rear suspen-<br>sion tie rod | Failure under load   |
| C3-18 | Chevrolet      | Impala                                       | 1969-1970 | Steering wheel               | Breakage   |
| 252   | Chevrolet      | ½-ton van and<br>passenger cars              | 1969      | Steering tie<br>rod end      | Suspected fatigue<br>failure in thread<br>section            |
| C3-07 | General Motors | GMC Astro-95<br>truck                        | 1971-1972 | Steering pit-<br>man arm     | Deterioration of<br>steering control                         |
| 258.5 | General Motors | Buick, Cadillac,<br>Oldsmobile,<br>Pontiac   | 1965-1969 | Engine mount                 | Secondary effects<br>from shearing of<br>engine mount        |
| 132   | General Motors | All models                                   | 1965-1966 | Quadrajct<br>carburetor      | Fuel leakage at<br>plug                                      |

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## Priority I •

| CASE   | MAKE             | MODEL                             | YEAR      | COMPONENT                               | POSSIBLE PROBLEM                             |
|--------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---|--|
| C3-02  | Honda motorcycle | CB 750, CB 500 & CB 450 (K3 & K4) | All       | Gas filler cap                          | Becomes dislodged allowing gas to be ignited |
| C2-23  | Mack trucks      | Mack truck tractor                | 1969-1970 | Front suspension, saddle block & U-bolt | Breakage                                     |
| C3-20  | Nissan Motors    | Datsun 240-Z                      | 1970-1972 | Front disc brake piston                 | Corrosion of disc brake caliper pistons      |
| C3-21* | Renault          | R-16                              | 1968-1970 | Front axle shaft                        | Hydraulic brake line severage                |
| C2-60  | Volkswagen       | All models                        | Pre-1963  | Heater                                  | Engine fumes in passenger compartment        |
| 278    | Volkswagen       | All models                        | 1965-1971 | Seat and seat track                     | Seat track separation during crashes         |
| C2-59  | Volkswagen       | Karmann Ghia                      | 1971-1972 | Fuel tank                               | Leakage                                      |

## Priority II

| CASE  | MAKE              | MODEL               | YEAR      | COMPONENT                      | POSSIBLE PROBLEM                                  |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|---|
| 190   | All manufacturers | Travel trailers     | 1965-1970 | Wheels, axles and tires        | Overloading of suspension components              |
| C2-09 | All manufacturers | All models          | All       | Motorcycle helmets             | Units providing inadequate protection             |
| C3-08 | American Motors   | All                 | 1971-1973 | Fasteners for front suspension | Insufficient torque control on critical fasteners |
| C3-13 | American Motors   | Ambassador, Matador | 1973      | Fuel tank                      | Leakage due to poor soldering                     |

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## Priority II

| CASE  | MAKE                     | MODEL                   | YEAR      | COMPONENT                                     | POSSIBLE PROBLEM                                |
|-------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|---|---|
| C2-05 | American Motors          | Jeepster                | 1971      | Service brake                                 | Rear brake lockup                               |
| C2-51 | Avco Motor Homes         | Grand Lodge             | 1971      | Gas tank location                             | Fume intrusion into electrical circuitry box    |
| 291   | Ford                     | Capri                   | 1971      | Evaporative emission system                   | Engine fires                                    |
| C2-50 | Ford                     | B7000 school bus        | Various   | Air brake hose                                | Rubbing at cross-member may cause rupture       |
| C2-25 | Ford                     | School bus              | 1966      | Brake line                                    | Corrosion failure                               |
| C3-14 | Ford                     | LTD Country Squire      | 1973      | Rear bumper support                           | Incomplete welds                                |
| 282   | Ford                     | Full size               | 1965-1970 | 15x5 wheel                                    | Inner bead seat failure                         |
| C2-53 | Ford                     | All models              | 1967-1971 | Brake master cylinder                         | Corrosion in cylinder                           |
| C2-61 | Ford                     | Full size               | 1968-1971 | 15x6.5 wheel                                  | Rivet, weld and/or disc failure                 |
| C2-32 | General Motors           | GMC, Chevrolet pick-up  | Various   | 15",16" single-piece wheel                    | Inner bead seat failure                         |
| C3-15 | Plymouth                 | Valiant                 | 1973      | Upper control arm cam bolt                    | Low or insufficient torque control on bolt      |
| C2-45 | Hamill Manufacturing Co. | Protecta-tot Model 9013 | Various   | Child seat                                    | Potential restraint problem                     |
| C3-16 | International Harvester  | Travelall               | 1972      | Fuel tank and front suspension fastener bolts | Miscellaneous quality control                   |
| C3-06 | International Harvester  | DCF 400                 | 1971-1972 | Exhaust system                                | Exhaust leakage, engine fume intrusion into cab |

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## Priority II

| CASE   | MAKE                             | MODEL                 | YEAR      | COMPONENT                      | POSSIBLE PROBLEM  |
|--------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|---|
| 248    | International Harvester          | 1600, 1700S, 1800 bus | 1958-1970 | Brake shoe                     | Shoe separation from reinforcement web                                |
| 276    | International Harvester          | 1200D                 | 1970      | Front spring U-bolt            | Breakage  |
| C2-08  | International Harvester          | Step-in van           | 1970-1971 | Steering linkage               | Wheel oscillations on rough surfaces                                  |
| C2-54  | Norton Villiers, Ltd. Motorcycle | Commando 750 cc       | Various   | Yoke                           | Cracking  |
| C2-55  | Open Road Motor Home             | Chevrolet 350 chassis | 1970-1972 | Front axle                     | Possible overloading  |
| C2-18  | Rockwell Standard                | Various trucks        | 1970-1971 | Front axle hub                 | Flaw in casting   |
| C2-19  | Rockwell Standard                | Tandem axle trailers  | 1960-1963 | Axle spindle                   | Overstress condition  |
| C3-19  | Toyota                           | Land Cruiser          | 1972      | Heater hose and gas tank       | Routing of hoses through interior of vehicle and location of gas tank |
| C2-28  | Warner Electric Brake Co.        | Various               | Various   | Electric brake                 | Magnet clutch failure   |
| C2-38  | Webb Wheel Div.                  | Semi-trailer          | Various   | 20" wheel                      | Flaw in casting   |
| 303    | Volkswagen                       | Microbus              | 1970      | Brake                          | Brake fade  |
| C3-22* | Volkswagen                       | Type I                | 1967-1973 | Seat belt and shoulder harness | Degradation due to battery acid contamination                         |
| 51     | (In litigation)                  |                       |           | 3-piece wheel                  |   |

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the highway  
loss reduction

**STATUS REPORT**

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