

Vehicle Recalls: Tips for Consumers

“Traffic crashes are the primary cause of debilitating injuries in the United States and the number one killer of Americans under the age of 34. In addition to staggering emotional costs, the annual economic loss to society because of these crashes, in terms of worker productivity, medical costs, insurance costs, etc, is estimated at more than \$230 billion. Clearly, there is a need for dramatic improvement in motor vehicle safety. Getting unsafe vehicles off the road is integral to improving safety and saving lives.”

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Stay connected

- Manufacturers must notify, by first-class mail, all registered owners and purchasers of the affected vehicles of the existence of the problem. Since names of vehicle owners are obtained from the state’s department of motor vehicles, it is important to keep your vehicle registration up to date. For car seats and other products, you should register your product with the company so they can contact you.
- www.safercar.gov offers a comprehensive list of both mandatory and voluntary vehicle recalls including recalls involving child seats.
- www.safercar.gov offers an email alert program which you can register for to receive the latest information on vehicle related recalls. You can receive emails for all recalls or you can specify up to five makes/model years.
- Always check the VIN on the manufacturer's website before buying, leasing, or borrowing a used car, since there is no federal or state prohibition against dealers putting consumers into unsafe, recalled used cars. The VIN is the 17 character number (made up of numbers and letters) usually found behind the steering wheel on the lower-left corner of the dashboard, viewable from outside through the windshield.

Get it fixed or replaced

- The manufacturer may choose to fix the problem free of charge, replace the vehicle or refund you. For car seats they may choose to repair free of charge or replace it.
 - NOTE – manufacturers are not required to do this if a vehicle is over ten years old.
- Repair - often this repair is done through an automobile dealer. Make sure you bring your recall notification letter to the dealer. It does not have to be the dealer where the vehicle was originally purchased. Most dealers should honor the recall and fix the defect free of charge to the customer. If not, contact the manufacturer and the NHSTA - (888) 327-4236. The NHSTA does monitor the effectiveness of recalls.
 - NOTE – the manufacturer is given time between the announcement of a recall and when they have provided dealers with the instructions for fixing the defect

so if you attempt to fix your vehicle within this time period (or if you fixed it before a recall was announced), you might be charged. Keep your receipts – you should be eligible to be reimbursed by the manufacturer.

Report problems

- Report all vehicle and equipment problems to the manufacturer and to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. You can report at www.safercar.gov or at (888) 327-4236.
- The NHTSA reviews all complaints and will initiate investigations based on this data so it is important to report any problems.