

Automotive News

NHTSA upgrades Ford unintended-acceleration probe

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WASHINGTON (Bloomberg) -- An investigation into complaints that loose floor mats in some Ford Motor Co. Fusion, Lincoln MKZ and Mercury Milan cars may jam accelerator pedals was upgraded by U.S. regulators.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said it intensified a probe opened in May 2010 to an engineering analysis after receiving 52 complaints.

The investigation covers about 480,000 cars from model years 2008 to 2010, NHTSA said today on its website.

Accelerator pedals may be stuck down by "unsecured or double stacked floor mats," NHTSA said.

No crashes or injuries have been reported, though some drivers said they had to shift into neutral or turn off the engine to slow down, according to the agency.

"We were disappointed by NHTSA's upgrade of this investigation, particularly since the condition under investigation relates to improperly installed, unsecured or double stacked floor mats, but we will continue to cooperate fully with the agency through this process," Susan Krusel, a Ford spokeswoman, said.

NHTSA's Ford investigation shows the regulator is continuing to learn about instances of unintended acceleration, similar to reports that plagued Toyota Motor Corp. in 2009 and 2010.

Toyota recalled more than 10 million cars and trucks worldwide after complaints that resulted in congressional hearings.

"It's certainly a red flag," Philip Reed, senior consumer advice editor for auto researcher Edmunds.com, said in an interview. "NHTSA takes it very, very seriously."

Toyota fines

Toyota paid record fines to NHTSA of \$48.8 million in 2010 for failing to recall models affected by the flaws in a timely manner. It still faces customer lawsuits related to the defects.

Toyota blamed floor mats that could jam pedals and accelerators that could stick in the down position, and NHTSA agreed.

Some auto-safety advocates have said they suspect electronics faults in the Toyota incidents and the National Academy of Sciences, which reviewed NHTSA's investigation, has said it couldn't rule that out.

Follow-up actions continue.

Toyota recalled 154,000 2010 Lexus RX SUVs on June 29 to fix and replace mats that can slip out of position and interfere with accelerator pedals.

Consumers need to take responsibility, especially during winter months, to not stack floor mats that could jam accelerators, particularly those pedals that hinge at the bottom instead of the top, Reed said.

"The manufacturers are very sensitive to this," he said. "There's only so much they can do. They have to provide an accelerator pedal, obviously. They're not fully in control of how people modify the vehicle."



NHTSA is investigating about 480,000 Ford Fusion, Lincoln MKZ and Mercury Milan models for accelerator pedals that may be stuck down by "unsecured or double stacked floor mats."

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