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Vehicle Recalls: Frequently Asked Questions

Your car is important to you, and your safety is important to us. But when your vehicle or motor vehicle equipment poses a safety risk to you, your passengers, or other motorists, then it can be recalled.

Find out how to know whether a safety recall has been issued on your car and what to do if you have a vehicle or motor vehicle safety problem.

WHAT'S A RECALL AND WHEN IS IT NECESSARY?

A recall is issued when a manufacturer or NHTSA determines that a vehicle, equipment, car seat, or tire creates an unreasonable safety risk or fails to meet minimum safety standards. Manufacturers are required to fix the problem by repairing it, replacing it, offering a refund, or in rare cases repurchasing the vehicle.

The United States Code for Motor Vehicle Safety (Title 49, Chapter 301) defines motor vehicle safety as “the performance of a motor vehicle or motor vehicle equipment in a way that protects the public against unreasonable risk of accidents occurring because of the design, construction, or performance of a motor vehicle, and against unreasonable risk of death or injury in an accident, and includes nonoperational safety of a motor vehicle.” A defect includes “any defect in performance, construction, a component, or material of a motor vehicle or motor vehicle equipment.” Generally, a safety defect is defined as a problem that exists in a motor vehicle or item of motor vehicle equipment that:

- **poses a risk to motor vehicle safety, and**
- **may exist in a group of vehicles of the same design or manufacture, or items of equipment of the same type and manufacture.**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

When your vehicle, equipment, car seat, or tire is subject to a recall, a safety defect has been identified that affects you. NHTSA monitors each safety recall to make sure owners receive safe, free, and effective remedies from manufacturers according to the Safety Act and Federal regulations. If there is a safety recall, your manufacturer will fix the problem free of charge.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF THERE'S A RECALL?

If you have registered your vehicle, your manufacturer will notify you if there's a safety recall by sending you a letter in the mail. Please do your part and make sure your vehicle registration is up-to-date, including your current mailing address.

SAFETY RECALL NOTICE

IMPORTANT SAFETY RECALL INFORMATION

Issued in Accordance
With Federal Law



See page 2 for more information on Vehicle Recalls.

You can also sign up to receive from NHTSA [e-mail recall notifications](#) affecting your make and model; download the [Safercar mobile app for iPhones](#) or [Safercar mobile app for Androids](#) to have recall alerts sent to your phone; or subscribe to [RSS feeds about safety-related recalls](#) for child restraints, vehicles and tires.

Manufacturers are obligated to attempt to notify owners of recalled products. For vehicles, that means manufacturers merge their own vehicle purchase records with current State vehicle registration information. For equipment, where State registration records do not exist, manufacturers are obligated to notify their distribution chain and known purchasers of the recalled equipment. However, even if you do not receive a notification, if your vehicle, child restraint, or other item of equipment is involved in a safety recall, the manufacturer is obligated to provide a free remedy.

WHAT DO I DO IF MY CAR IS RECALLED?

When you receive a notification, follow any interim safety guidance provided by the manufacturer and contact your local dealership. Whether you receive a recall notification or are subject to a safety improvement campaign, it is very important that you visit your dealer to have the vehicle serviced. The dealer will fix the recalled part or portion of your car for free. If a dealer refuses to repair your vehicle in accordance with the recall letter, you should notify the manufacturer immediately. You can also file a complaint with NHTSA at www.safercar.gov and provide as many details as possible, including the name of the dealership and any personnel involved.

CAN I FIND OUT NOW IF THERE'S A RECALL ON MY CAR?

Yes. Visit Safercar.gov to [look up recalls by VIN](#), or go to your manufacturer's Web site to see if there's a recall. You will need your Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) to do the lookup. You can also download our:

- [Safercar mobile app for iPhones](#)
- [Safercar mobile app for Androids](#)

WHERE DO I FIND MY VIN?

Look on the lower left of your car's windshield for your 17-digit Vehicle Identification Number (VIN). Your VIN is also located on your car's registration card, and it may be shown on your insurance card.



WILL MY VIN INFORMATION BE KEPT PRIVATE?

Your personal information (i.e., your VIN) is not stored or filed in any way.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS OF MY VIN LOOKUP MEAN?

There are three recall status types that might display after you [look up a VIN for safety recalls](#):

- **Recall INCOMPLETE** – This means that an incomplete or “open” recall was found on the car and the owner should follow the remedy instructions.
- **Recall INCOMPLETE. Remedy Not Yet Available** – This means that an incomplete or “open” recall was found on the car, but the manufacturer is not yet ready to provide the needed remedy or fix.
- **Number of Open Recalls: 0** – This means that either you have no recalls associated with your car or your car has already been fixed.

WHAT IF MY CAR ISN'T RECALLED NOW? COULD IT BE RECALLED LATER?

Yes. Whether a manufacturer independently conducts a safety recall or NHTSA orders one, the manufacturer must file a public report describing the safety-related defect or noncompliance. Manufacturers are also required to notify owners by mail within 60 days of notifying NHTSA of a recall decision. Look for this distinct label to distinguish critical safety recall information from other marketing material:



HOW CAN I REPORT A SAFETY PROBLEM TO NHTSA?

Reporting a vehicle or equipment safety problem to NHTSA is an important first step to get the situation remedied and make our roads safer. If we receive similar reports from a number of people about the same product, this could indicate a safety-related defect may exist that would warrant opening an investigation. [Report your vehicle or equipment safety complaint on Safercar.gov.](#)

WE PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY. We do not share your personal information with the general public. Your complaint will be added to a public NHTSA database only after we remove all information from complaint fields that identify you personally.

WILL I BE CONTACTED?

In some cases, an investigator from the Office of Defects Investigation may call to clarify information from your report. Unfortunately, the large volume of reports received by the Agency does not permit a return call for each report filed.

WHAT IS NHTSA'S PROCESS FOR INVESTIGATING SAFETY PROBLEMS?

Our technical experts review each and every call, letter, and online report of an alleged safety problem filed with NHTSA. Although we have no jurisdiction over defects that are not safety-related, we do review each report that suggests a potential safety defect involving groups of motor vehicles or vehicle equipment. There is no established number of reports that must be filed before NHTSA investigates an issue.

The investigative process of NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation consists of four parts:

- **Screening** — A preliminary review of consumer complaints and other information related to alleged defects to decide whether to open an investigation
- **Analysis** — An analysis of any petitions calling for defect investigations and/or reviews of safety-related recalls
- **Investigation** — The investigation of alleged safety defects
- **Management** — Investigation of the effectiveness of safety recalls