

# Chrysler Refuses NHTSA’s Request for 2.7M Jeep Recall

by Irena Granaas

Chrysler made headlines last week by defying the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) request for a recall of two of the company’s most popular Jeeps.

NHTSA asserts the vehicles have a design defect in the placement of their gas tanks, making them prone to catch fire when the vehicles are subjected to rear-end collisions, sometimes resulting in fatalities.

Chrysler issued a formal statement last week in which the automaker laid out its reasons for declining the request by NHTSA to issue a recall of the Jeep Grand Cherokee, model years 1993-2004, and the Jeep Liberty, model years 2002-2007.

According to Chrysler, the recall would involve about 2.7 million vehicles.

“Chrysler Group has been working and sharing data with the agency on this issue since Sept. 2010,” Chrysler said in its June 4 statement. “The company does not agree with NHTSA’s conclusions and does not intend to recall the vehicles cited in the investigation.”

Chrysler said the subject vehicles “are safe and are not defective . . . We believe NHTSA’s initial conclusions are based on an incomplete analysis of the underlying data, and we are committed to continue working with the agency to resolve the disagreement.”

Chrysler Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne emphasized that driver and passenger safety “has long been the first priority for Chrysler brands,” a commitment that continues, but added the company stands behind the quality of its vehicles.

In the June 4 statement, the automaker further said the vehicles in question “met and exceeded all applicable requirements” of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards.

According to Chrysler’s own analysis, the incidents cited by NHTSA occur less than once for every million miles of vehicle operation, a rate “similar to comparable vehicles produced and sold during the time in question.”

## Chrysler Extends Streak of Monthly Sales Gains to 38

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sales increases for all of its Jeep brands. The Jeep Compass crossover compact SUV surged 42 percent, its best sales month ever, and the largest sales gain among Jeep brands. Sales of the flagship Jeep Grand Cherokee also posted double-digit gains of 21 percent, its best May sales in eight years.

“We continue to see strong retail sales throughout our product lineup as eight Chrysler Group vehicles set sales records in May, including best sales ever by the Jeep Wrangler and Compass,” said Reid Bigland, head of U.S. Sales.

“Sales of the Jeep Wrangler are incredibly hot,” Kisiel said.

He added that Chrysler’s strides in improving the quality of its vehicles have third parties taking notice, which is also bringing buyers into Chrysler dealerships.

Kisiel cited the recent award recognition by Strategic Vision’s annual Total Quality Index (TQI), survey of more than 17,500 owners of 2013 model-year vehicles, with the Dodge Dart compact car and Durango full-size SUV dominating their segment. The Chrysler Town and Country minivan and the Chrysler 200 also ranked at the top of their respective segments in the survey.

In a White Paper that Chrysler issued along with their refusal statement, the automaker cited a number of “problems” with NHTSA’s analysis, including:

- All vehicles in question exceeded the requirements of NHTSA’s FMVSS 301, the agency’s own standard by which fuel system design is evaluated in the U.S.

- A review of almost 30 years of field data showed an “extremely low” number of rear impact crashes resulting in a fire or fuel leak in a fleet of more than five million of the subject vehicles that have clocked more than 500 billion miles over 50 million registered vehicle years.

- In the vast majority of incidents cited by NHTSA resulting in injuries or fatalities, the crash force “was far in excess of the rear crash fuel leak requirements” in place at the time these vehicles were manufactured, and also more than the requirements in place today.

The company further stated in the White Paper that NHTSA used an “incomplete and unrepresentative” group of vehicles to make comparisons with.

The statement continued: “Data from NHTSA’s Fatality Analysis Reporting System show 24 models – none of which has been subjected to recall – are more likely to be involved in a fire-related, rear-impact fatality than the 2002-2007 Jeep Liberty; 54 models are more likely than the 1993-2004 Jeep Grand Cherokee.”

And Chrysler further asserts that NHTSA “does not consider all available data,” omitting two of its own data sources in NASS (National Automotive Sampling System) when examining the performance of similar vehicles in the same product niche.

Chrysler makes the point in its White Paper that all but one fatal crash involving a Jeep Grand Cherokee, and all but four involving the Liberty were “high-energy crashes,” such as one crash cited by NHTSA where a stationary Jeep Grand Cherokee was struck by a tractor-trailer at 65 mph, which resulted in crash energy more than 23 times that of the required performance standard.

The Chrysler statement concluded by saying it stands behind the quality and safety of its vehicles and conducts voluntary recalls when they are warranted, “in most cases, before any notice or investigation request from NHTSA,” and inviting customers with concerns to contact its Customer Care Line at 877-426-5337.

NHTSA officials remain focused on getting Chrysler to conduct the recall NHTSA believes is necessary to protect consumers.

A NHTSA statement said: “The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is deeply committed to safeguarding the driving public.

“Our data shows that these vehicles may contain a defect that presents an unreasonable risk to safety, which is why we took the next step of writing Chrysler.

“The driving public should know that NHTSA is actively investigating this issue and is requesting that Chrysler initiate a safety recall and notify all affected owners of the defect.”

The statement continued: “NHTSA hopes that Chrysler will reconsider its position and take action to protect its customers and the driving public.”

NHTSA’s analysis studied fatal

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Sergio Marchionne

and non-fatal incidents of rear-impact crashes involving the vehicles named in the recall. According to the agency, there were 15 deaths from 2003 to 2012 resulting from rear-impact collisions in the Jeep Grand Cherokee built on the WJ platform and 27 fatalities from 1998 to 2012 from incidents involving the ZJ platform Grand Cherokee.

NHTSA reports that seven people died in rear-impact collisions in the Jeep Liberty (KJ platform) from 2006 to 2010.



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