

U.S. investigates side air bag problem

LA TIMES 2/22/12

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT — U.S. safety regulators are investigating a problem with side air bags that may fail to inflate in a crash.

The problem already has caused recalls of more than 2,700 Toyota, Honda, Subaru and Nissan vehicles, but that number could grow if the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration determines that more automakers used similar defective parts.

The recalled vehicles could have an ineffective mixture of the gas that inflates the side air bags in a crash. That mix could prevent air bags from inflating, raising the risk of injury, the agency website said. So far no one has been hurt.

All four companies told NHTSA that the Swedish safety parts maker Autoliv Inc. made the propellant for the side air bags.

Autoliv said Tuesday that the problem occurred one time in production parts tests at minus-22 degrees.

But further tests indicated a risk of malfunctions at low temperatures, and customers who used the parts were told of the problem.

Autoliv also supplies parts to General Motors Co., Ford Motor Co., Volkswagen, Hyundai Motor Co. and Kia Motors Corp., according to its website, but it was unclear whether they got the same air bag inflaters.

Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. first discovered the problem and reported it to NHTSA on Jan. 31, the documents said.