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Women more likely to mistake gas pedal for brakes, report says

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Women are more likely than men to mistake the gas pedal for the brakes, according to federal safety regulators.

"The most consistent finding across data sources was the striking overrepresentation of females in pedal misapplication crashes, relative to their involvement in all types of crashes," the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a report supporting its proposal this week to require automakers to make brake-throttle override systems standard in all vehicles.

The override systems help drivers regain control when a vehicle accelerates suddenly. Analysts say the override will help stop many instances of sudden acceleration but aren't likely to prevent people from careening out of control when they step on the wrong pedal.

NHTSA estimates that there are about 15 pedal misapplication crashes per month in the United States, and that the drivers in almost two-thirds of such crashes were women.

The agency speculated on several reasons women might be more likely to be involved in such crashes.

The incidents occur most often in parking lots, NHTSA said.

The agency also noted that women typically have "a poorer fit in their cars due to



RICK LOOMIS Los Angeles Times

"A POORER FIT in their cars due to shorter stature" may raise the likelihood of error, NHTSA said.

shorter stature, which may increase the likelihood of a pedal application error."

But male drivers should be warned before stereotyping women as bad drivers. NHTSA says men are more likely to be involved in an accident in general.

NHTSA data show that men were involved in 57% of crashes while women were involved in 43%. Additionally, male drivers are three times as likely as female drivers to be killed in a crash.

The agency noted that the most notorious incident of pedal error was the 2003 crash at the Santa Monica farmers market, in which an elderly man punched the gas instead of the brakes and killed 10 pedestrians and injured 63 others.

Drivers ages 16 to 20 and those 76 or older were most likely to be involved in pedal misapplication crashes.

"The single factor that may explain over-involve-

ment in pedal misapplication crashes at both ends of the driver age distribution is poor executive function. The relevant areas of the brain do not fully develop until young adulthood, and have been shown to decline with advanced age," NHTSA said in its report.

Driver inattention and distraction also were common contributing factors across all age groups, the agency said.

NHTSA also noted that it could be underestimating the number of pedal misapplication crashes because its data are based on news reports and such crashes could be unreported.

"Most of the conclusions to be drawn from this project are tentative, pointing to the need for additional research to better understand the reasons for this driver behavior," NHTSA said.

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