



Memorandum

Date: April 13, 2021

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | Audit of NHTSA's Oversight of Vehicle and Equipment Defects Investigations | Project No. 21S3001S000 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

From: David Pouliott 
Assistant Inspector General for Surface Transportation Audits

To: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is responsible for motor vehicle safety and its Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) investigates safety defects, oversees safety recall campaigns, and assesses recall effectiveness.¹ NHTSA continues to oversee the largest-ever automotive recall, involving defective airbags manufactured by TK Holdings Inc. (Takata).² Over the past several years, NHTSA has managed this recall, and as reported in December 2020,³ about 50 million airbags have been replaced. However, an estimated 11 million vehicles with the recalled airbags⁴ remain on the road.

Identifying vehicle safety defects and monitoring recalls remains key to reducing overall traffic crashes and fatalities. To better meet this goal, NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation recently restructured the office and reformed its processes. Our objective for this self-initiated audit is to assess NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation's current processes for identifying and investigating safety defects.

¹ The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 (Pub. L. 89-563), as amended, authorizes NHTSA to investigate issues related to motor vehicle safety and to set and enforce standards. The Act also requires manufacturers to notify NHTSA of all safety-related defects involving unreasonable risk of accident, death, or injury, and to recall and repair defects in vehicles and equipment that fail to meet standards.

² When deployed in a crash, these airbags could shower metal fragments into front-seat vehicle occupants with fatal consequences. To date, there have been 18 confirmed deaths—including 2 fatalities in summer 2020—and more than 400 injuries attributable to defective Takata airbags.

³ *Update on the State of the Takata Airbag Recalls*, Independent Monitor of Takata and the Coordinated Remedy Program, December 22, 2020.

⁴ Recent model year vehicles with front, side, front-center and rear-window curtain airbags may have more than one defective airbag.

We plan to begin the audit later this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance meeting. We will conduct our work at NHTSA Headquarters. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-1844 or Wendy Harris, Program Director, at 202-366-2794.

cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
NHTSA Audit Liaison