

Millions of recalled vehicles unrepaired yearly

Although many owners neglect repairs, safety experts say the system used to track recalled vehicles is insufficient

BY DEE-ANN DURBIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Timothy Michaud died in May after falling from the tailgate of a Chevrolet pickup and suffering severe head injuries.

The 19-year-old from Maine never knew that General Motors Corp. had recalled the pickup two months earlier because the tailgate cables could corrode and snap. At the time of the accident, Michaud's employer — who owned the used 2000 pickup — hadn't received a recall notice, said Stephen Schwarz, an attorney for the Michaud family.

The pickup was one of the millions of recalled vehicles that go unrepaired each year. Sometimes, vehicle owners

are at fault for not getting repairs. But some safety experts say automakers and federal regulators share the blame because they haven't developed a better system to track whether a vehicle has in fact been repaired.

"California requires that whenever you go in for registration, they check what emissions recalls have been done," said Clarence Ditlow of the Center for Auto Safety, an advocacy group. "If you can do it for emissions recalls, you can do it for safety recalls."

Kathy DeMeter, director of defect investigations for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said around 72 percent of recalled vehicles are repaired each year. That means that in 2003, when 19.1 million vehicles were recalled, about 5.3

million vehicles weren't repaired.

While the repair rate is lower than the NHTSA would like, DeMeter said it's up from a decade ago, when the average was 65 percent. She also said it is higher than other auto-related products. Only 35 percent of recalled tires and 45 percent of recalled child seats are repaired because it is harder to track the owners.

"People are becoming more aware of safety, and manufacturers are doing a better job of notifying them," DeMeter said.

Automakers are required to give the NHTSA repair data for six quarters after they send a notification letter to owners. If repair rates are exceptionally low, DeMeter said, the NHTSA will occasionally require an automaker to send a second notice.

Ford Motor Co. has one of the highest repair rates — around 80 percent — because it sends multiple letters to

owners instead of the one letter the NHTSA requires, DeMeter said. Charlie Kopeika, Ford's manager of recalls, said the company will send up to five letters and postcards over two years.

Ford buys registration data from states to track down vehicles even after they've changed owners. Despite those efforts, a certain percentage of owners are never found, Kopeika said. The oldest Ford recall that the NHTSA is still tracking, a 1999 recall of Windstar minivans with a fuel tank problem, shows 3,253 of the 83,052 owners were never reached. Automakers don't have to contact owners if the vehicles have been moved abroad.

Repair rates for newer vehicles are generally higher. As of Sept. 30, one year after they were recalled because of a fuel tank defect, 90.6 percent of 2004 Toyota Sienna minivans had been repaired. By comparison, the repair rate for older models of the

Volkswagen New Beetle was 56.7 percent on Sept. 30, a year after they were recalled because of faulty brake lights.

Federal law has required automakers to provide free repairs for safety-related defects since 1966. Since then, more than 366 million vehicles have been recalled in the United States.

Automakers won't reveal how much they spend on recalls, but the costs go into the billions. The Automotive Industry Action Group, a Michigan-based advocacy group for the auto industry, said automakers can save \$25 million for every 10 percent decrease in the time it takes to find a defect. Earlier this year, GM cited high recall costs as a drag on its second-quarter profits.

Despite the expense of providing repairs, Kopeika said manufacturers can be trusted to make sure owners know about recalls.

"It's a huge customer satisfaction issue," Kopeika said.

Washington state faces possible third vote recount

Dino Rossi was declared the state's governor-elect, but his opponent could contest the 42-vote margin

BY DAVID AMMONS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Republican Dino Rossi took up the mantle of governor-elect on Tuesday, but an unprecedented third vote count could keep Rossi and Democratic rival Christine Gregoire guessing until almost Christmas — or later.

Secretary of State Sam Reed, the state's chief elections officer, certified Rossi as the victor by a mere 42 votes. Reed called it the closest governor's race in U.S. history, with a margin of little more than a

thousandth of 1 percentage point separating winner and loser.

Reed said Rossi's recount victory means he's legally the governor-elect. Rossi took up the title, no matter how short-lived. He told a victory news conference he's moving forward with selecting a cabinet and preparing plans to stir the anemic state economy.

He reached out to Democrats, particularly those who control both houses of the Legislature.

Rossi acknowledged his victory isn't assured, however, since Gregoire and

the state Democratic Party are expected to demand a manual recount of all or part of the state on Friday.

He didn't use the word "concede," but made it clear he thinks Gregoire should drop her challenge. In an interview, Rossi said she and the Democrats "have to decide if they'll be looking at the best interest of the state of Washington and be gracious."

Rossi, 45, a former legislative power who rose from poverty to riches in real estate investments, told reporters Gregoire "ran a spirited campaign, and she has to decide if she's going to go forward or not (with a recount)."

"If you count and recount and recount and keep on counting until you finally win, what do you really have in the end? An illegitimate

governorship, that's what you have in the end," he said. "It's time to move forward; that's the message."

Rossi planned a victory celebration in Bellevue Tuesday night.

"It feels good. We're in the right spot," Rossi said in an interview. "It's the second time we've been validated as the winner. This is over."

Unlike Rossi's public display of triumph, Gregoire, 57, the state attorney general for the past 12 years, kept out of sight and worked on a recount strategy — and her own transition efforts.

Gregoire rejected the notion that Rossi had won.

"Sen. Rossi and I are both moving ahead with our transition plans, even though the election is undecided," she said in a statement released by her

campaign. "It's still the wise thing to do. By going ahead with our transition plans, both candidates will be in a position to lead the state in January."

Her statement said the race remains too close to call, with what the campaign called "thousands of disputed ballots across the state."

Democrats were still mulling how extensive the manual recount should be. Spokeswoman Kirstin Brost said the campaign and the party would prefer a full statewide recount of all 6,686 precincts, but might not be able to afford the cost.

The state wants a 25-cent-per-voter deposit at the time the recount is demanded — at least \$700,000 for a statewide count.

CULTURAL CLEANSING

FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has persecuted the Bahá'ís, a peaceful, law-abiding religious minority. More than two hundred leading Bahá'ís have been put to death, tens of thousands have lost their jobs, tens of thousands more have felt compelled to leave their homeland, Bahá'í youth have been denied access to higher education, and retired workers have had their pensions summarily canceled. In 1991 an official government document signed by Supreme Leader Khamenei spelled out measures aimed at slowly strangling the community.

DESTROYING
A COMMUNITY.
ERASING
MEMORY.



The hatred of the extremist mullahs for the Bahá'ís is such that they, like the Taliban of Afghanistan who destroyed the towering Buddhist sculptures at Bamiyan, intend not only to eradicate the religion, but even to erase all traces of its existence in the country of its birth. It was for this reason they demolished the House of the Báb in Shiraz, center of pilgrimage for the Bahá'ís of the world and a gem of the city's cherished past. This is why they confiscated Bahá'í cemeteries and bulldozed the graves of Bahá'í heroes and saints. This is why they desecrated the resting place of Qudús, one of the apostles of the faith.

This June a wrecking crew descended upon a historical monument, a precious example of Islamic-Iranian architecture, "a matchless model of art, spirituality, and architecture." "How is it," a brave Tehran newspaper article asked, "that in the middle of the day...the very essence of our cultural heritage is being destroyed?" The answer is heartbreakingly simple.

The demolished building was the house of a great nineteenth-century statesman, calligrapher and literary figure, Mirza Abbas Nuri. Although he was born and died a Muslim, his son, Bahá'u'lláh, founded the Bahá'í Faith, a religion that promotes abolition of all prejudice, independent investigation of truth, equality of women and men, universal education, harmony of religion and science, and universal peace. For this the clerical bigots have declared Bahá'ís, followers of Bahá'u'lláh, to be heretics and apostates, deserving of death.

In their determination to rid Iran of the Bahá'í community and obliterate its very memory, the fundamentalists in power are prepared even to destroy the cultural heritage of their own country, which they appear not to realize they hold in trust for humankind. Surely the time has come for Iranians everywhere to raise their voices in protest against such willful desecrations.

For more information, please visit www.bahaiworldnews.org.

Friday December 3, 4-6:00pm
Knight Library Browsing Room, University of Oregon
sponsored by the UO Bahá'í Campus Association in collaboration with the UO Chapter of Amnesty International and the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of Eugene
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