

BMW recalls SUVs after Takata air bag inflator blows apart, hurling shrapnel and injuring driver

December 3 2023, by Tom Krisher



This is the BMW logo on display at the 2020 Pittsburgh International Auto Show Thursday, Feb.13, 2020 in Pittsburgh. BMW is recalling a small number of SUVs in the U.S., Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023, because the driver's air bag inflators can blow apart in a crash, hurling metal shrapnel and possibly injuring or killing people in the vehicles. Credit: AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar, File

BMW is recalling a small number of SUVs in the U.S. because the driver's air bag inflators can blow apart in a crash, hurling metal shrapnel and possibly injuring or killing people in the vehicles.

U.S. auto safety regulators say in [documents posted Saturday](#) that the recall covers 486 X3, X4 and X5 SUVs from the 2014 model year that are equipped with [air bags](#) made by Takata Corp. of Japan.

The recall raises questions about the safety of about 30 million Takata inflators that are under investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Most have not been recalled.

Takata used volatile ammonium nitrate to create a small explosion to inflate air bags in a crash. But the chemical can deteriorate over time when exposed to high temperatures and humidity. It can explode with too much force, blowing apart a metal canister and spewing shrapnel.

At least 26 people have been killed in the U.S. by Takata inflators since May 2009, and at least 30 have died worldwide including people in Malaysia and Australia. In addition, about 400 people have been injured.

Potential for a dangerous malfunction led to the largest series of auto recalls in U.S. history, with at least 67 million Takata inflators involved. The U.S. government says many have not been repaired. About 100 million inflators have been recalled worldwide. The exploding air bags sent Takata into bankruptcy.

Documents say the inflators in the BMWs have a moisture absorbing chemical called a dessicant that were not part of previous recalls.

BMW says in documents that in November, it was told of a complaint to NHTSA that the driver's air bag in a 2014 X3 had ruptured. The automaker began investigating and hasn't determined an exact cause. But

preliminary information points to a manufacturing problem from Feb. 22, 2014 to March 7, 2014, the documents said.

The German automaker says in documents that it's still investigating but it has not yet been able to inspect the X3 with the faulty air bag.

NHTSA records show a complaint saying that on Oct. 23, the inflator on a 2014 X3 exploded in Chicago, sending a large piece of metal into the driver's lung. The driver also had chest and shoulder cuts that appeared to be caused by shrapnel, the complaint said. A surgeon removed a gold-colored disc from the driver's lung, according to the complaint, which did not identify the driver.

NHTSA says Takata air bags with a dessicant are under investigation because they have the potential to explode and expel shrapnel. The investigation opened in 2021 covers more than 30 million inflators in over 200 models from 20 car and truck makers, including Honda, Stellantis, General Motors, Ford, Nissan, Tesla, BMW, Toyota, Jaguar Land Rover, Daimler Vans, Mitsubishi, Subaru, Mercedes-Benz, Ferrari, McLaren, Porsche, Mazda, Karma, Fisker, Spartan Fire vehicles.

The agency decided in May of 2020 not to recall the inflators with the dessicant, but said it would monitor them.

"While no present safety risk has been identified, further work is needed to evaluate the future risk of non-recalled dessicated inflators," the agency said in a document opening the probe.

A spokeswoman for NHTSA said Saturday she would check into the status of the investigation. A message was left seeking comment from BMW.

In the BMW recall, dealers will replace the air bags at no cost to owners,

who will be notified by letter starting Jan. 16.

The BMW recall comes after General Motors recalled nearly 900 vehicles in July with Takata inflators that have the dessicant. GM also blamed the problem on a manufacturing defect at Takata.

In a statement about the GM recall last summer, NHTSA said the agency did not have any data suggesting that other dessicated Takata inflators might rupture.

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