Air Bag Safety Fatality File

Defective Takata Airbag Inflator Causes 17th U.S. Death

Subject of the largest recall in U.S. automotive history, the airbag was in a 2002 Honda Civic and had been under an aggressive recall for years.

Just this past August, Reuters reported, Honda settled an investigation into the problem by U.S. states, agreeing to pay $85 million.

A defective Takata airbag killed a Honda driver in August, marking at least the 17th death caused by the shrapnel-shooting airbags in the U.S.

According to Reuters and Associated Press reports, an unnamed driver was killed when the airbag in a 2002 Honda Civic exploded after a crash in Mesa, Arizona, on August 20. No other details of the crash were available. This particular car is one of seven “Alpha” Honda models from the early 2000s with frontal airbags that are most likely to rupture during a crash and shoot shrapnel from the inflator into the car’s occupants. The Alpha cars have a 50 percent chance of their airbags failing, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which has led a recall on 56 million Takata airbag inflators since 2013 that is the largest automotive recall in U.S. history.

At least 26 people have died worldwide and several hundred have been injured from the airbag inflators. Several have occurred in Malaysia and Australia. Nearly all have occurred in older Honda vehicles, although two deaths in the U.S. have occurred in Ford vehicles. In June 2018, another driver in Arizona was killed in a 2002 Civic.

In August 2020, shortly after the Arizona driver was killed, Honda settled with 46 U.S. states for $85 million over its involvement

with the airbag inflators. The automaker had reportedly known about the defect for years before the massive recall began. Takata is now bankrupt after being fined $1 billion by the U.S. and hit with multiple lawsuits. Multiple auto suppliers are manufacturing replacement airbag inflators. Despite aggressive recall efforts, about 30 percent of affected cars in the U.S. have not been repaired.