

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 2, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As we learn of yet another tragic and completely preventable death related to faulty Takata airbags, we write urging the Administration to recall every car with an airbag containing ammonium nitrate as its propellant, and to use every tool at its disposal to accelerate the repair of all the vehicles that contain them.

As reported in the *New York Times*, Joel Knight was driving on a highway in South Carolina when his truck hit a stray cow. Instead of cushioning Mr. Knight from the impact, the Takata airbag on his Ford Ranger ruptured. Shrapnel from the airbag punctured his neck and he bled to death. At the time of this incident, the number of vehicles affected by Takata recalls had reached 19 million, but did not include his Ford Ranger — or any Ford models, for that matter. Mr. Knight had no idea that his car even contained a Takata airbag. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) did not add Ford as an automaker affected by Takata recalls until after it had learned of Mr. Knight's death.

It has been apparent for some time that the use of ammonium nitrate is the source of the problem with the faulty Takata airbags. Takata is the only major airbag manufacturer to use this compound, which is well known by experts to be unstable when exposed to moisture or humid environments. It is believed that as many as 54 million metal inflators containing this explosive compound are installed in vehicles in the United States. While about 28 million of these inflators have been recalled to date through vehicle recalls, a staggering 26 million remain in vehicles not yet recalled. Yet NHTSA has resisted our repeated calls to expand its recall.

While we have been somewhat encouraged by NHTSA's recent more aggressive stance on automobile safety enforcement once violations are discovered, we are troubled that it has not shown the same commitment to the Takata crisis or to making permanent changes to auto safety regulations in order to prevent more avoidable deaths in the future. In fact, it appears that NHTSA has consistently deferred to Takata as it set forth its requirements to industry, first by allowing many automakers to take voluntary rather than mandatory actions to alert vehicle-owners to this defect's existence, then by limiting the recalls to cars registered in 'high humidity' states absent evidence that the defect would not manifest itself outside these arbitrary boundaries, and now with its apparent policy of waiting until someone has died in a particular make and model before recalling that make and model. This, coupled with NHTSA's willingness to allow

Takata to take until the end of 2018 to prove that ammonium nitrate is safe in existing airbags; and until 2019 to show that the latest models of the inflators that use the compound are safe, is an outrageous dereliction of NHTSA's basic duty to protect consumers.

In light of the evidence thus far, and the 10 deaths and more than 100 injuries we know of related to faulty Takata airbags, we strongly believe consumers have a right to know today, whether they are driving a vehicle with a Takata airbag containing ammonium nitrate. And we certainly expect a more aggressive effort to ensure that these vehicles are quickly repaired. Accordingly, we urge the Administration to use its authority to direct NHTSA to expand the current recall so that all consumers driving a vehicle with a Takata airbag are made aware of this fact and can take appropriate action to protect themselves and their families.

We do not need to wait for yet another preventable death to happen in order to recall the remaining population of vehicles containing ammonium nitrate-propelled airbags. Thank you for your attention to this letter.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate