

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

October 29, 2014

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), under the U.S. Department of Transportation, administers highway safety and consumer programs intended to save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce economic costs resulting from motor vehicle crashes. To carry out its broad safety mission, NHTSA has a wide variety of responsibilities—ranging from administering grants to states and localities that fund initiatives to mitigate safety risks on the nation's highways to overseeing the automobile industry's efforts to manufacture cars that are free of defects. In 2013, vehicle manufacturers initiated 632 recall campaigns in the United States covering 22 million vehicles, an increase from 2012, when they issued 581 vehicle recalls covering 16.4 million vehicles.

In early 2014, General Motors recalled more than 2 million vehicles due to faulty ignition switches that could shut off power to the front airbags. According to GM, these defects resulted in at least 31 crashes and 13 deaths before the recall was initiated. As demonstrated by investigations conducted in the wake of this recall, GM's flawed approach to safety contributed to the tragic failure to identify this defect in a timely fashion.

In light of this and other recent recalls affecting millions of vehicles, however, our committee, safety experts, and other industry officials have questioned why NHTSA did not act more quickly to mandate recalls before the auto companies voluntarily did so. An investigation of the GM recalls by the committee revealed NHTSA lacked a comprehensive understanding of vehicle systems the agency is responsible for regulating, contributing to the inaction on this defect. As vehicle functions and safety systems become more complex, these findings raise concerns about NHTSA's process for obtaining data and investigating vehicle defects and the agency's broader framework and readiness for adapting to technological advances in the industries it oversees.

Because of these issues, we are requesting that GAO conduct a review of NHTSA, including the agency's information sharing and information gathering capabilities and readiness to adapt to technological change. Specifically, we request that your review address the following questions:

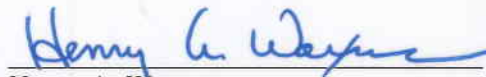
1. To what extent have NHTSA or other organizations evaluated NHTSA's ability to adapt its regulatory structure to new developments in automotive technology? To what extent has NHTSA successfully adapted to new developments in automotive technology?
2. How does NHTSA facilitate information sharing across its directorates about new developments in automotive technology and safety?
3. What challenges, if any, does NHTSA face in its oversight of new automotive technologies?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact John Ohly of the Committee on Energy and Commerce staff at 202-225-2927.

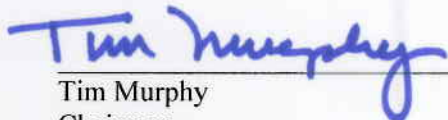
Sincerely,



Fred Upton
Chairman



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



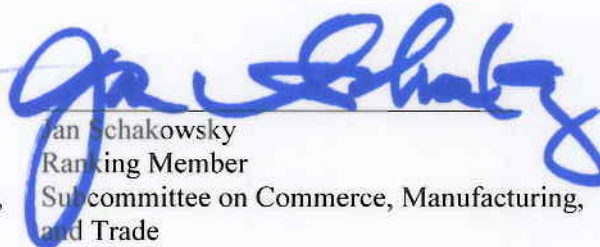
Tim Murphy
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations



Lee Terry
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing,
and Trade



Jan Schakowsky
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing,
and Trade