

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Honorable Todd Young to John D. Burretta

Question 1. In your testimony, you mention the challenge of not only identifying who owns the vehicles that need to be fixed, but also how to “identify messaging that clearly communicates the defect’s risk to consumers and motivates them to act.”

What lessons have you learned in the process of developing communications to consumers that motivates them to act?

Response. Through focus groups, in-depth interviews, online surveys and a “mystery shopper” program conducted in 2016, as well as additional focus groups and a national quantitative survey conducted in 2017, I learned that awareness among affected vehicle owners as of that time as to the existence of the recall, the scope of the Takata recalls, the severity of the Takata defect and the urgency of the recall was incomplete. Many affected vehicle owners did not understand that many different vehicle makes and models are affected, did not believe the defect is serious and did not know the repair is free and requires little time to be conducted. The research established various points regarding effective recall communications, including:

Outreach materials should unambiguously convey the urgency of the situation and provide a clear and persuasive call to action, using disruptive imagery that captures the attention of affected vehicle owners and ensures outreach materials are not discarded or forgotten.

Communications using bright, attention-grabbing colors, employing words like “kill” and “explode” are likely to effectively drive action.

Sharing concrete facts regarding the Takata recalls, such as the number of vehicles affected or the number of deaths and injuries that have occurred, helps affected vehicle owners understand the urgent safety risk defective Takata inflators pose and the importance of having one’s vehicle repaired immediately.

Sending traditional mailers on one or two occasions does not adequately convey the urgency of the Takata recalls. Repeated reminders are important.

Recall outreach should clearly convey that the repair is free of charge.

Communications should use personalized messages with the vehicle owner’s name and showing pictures of the make, model and model year of the owner’s vehicle.

Communications should convey clearly the availability of services that would minimize inconvenience, such as free towing, free loaner vehicles, extended dealership hours or the availability of mobile repair service.

Communications should clearly convey the availability of replacement parts.

Communications should identify a clear, simple and actionable process through which recipients can take steps to remedy the problem, such as a URL or phone number through which vehicle owners can schedule a repair appointment.

Providing outreach materials in a language affected vehicle owners can understand is key to ensuring they understand the content of the message. Content should be in multiple languages.

Further details regarding this research and resulting findings are set out in my November 2017 report entitled The State of the Takata Recalls, which may be accessed at https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/the_state_of_the_takata_airbag_recalls-report_of_the_independent_monitor_112217_v3_tag.pdf.

Question 2. In the development of those messages, have you consulted with behavioral economists to help identify the most effective methods? If not, do you believe this is the type of problem a behavioral economist might play a constructive role in developing best practices?

Response. In the development of my communications recommendations and related pilot initiatives, I consulted with professional communication strategists and research analysts who specialize in consumer perceptions, communications strategy, message refinement and tactical program development. Consistent with behavioral economic theory, our consultants focused on the strategic use of language, imagery and incentives to help vehicle owners overcome the perceived costs, barriers and biases that might inhibit their getting their defective airbags repaired. I believe these approaches effectively address the issues surrounding Takata-related recall outreach.