

Ford Motor Company

James P. Vondela, Director
Automotive Safety Office
Environmental & Safety Engineering

September 8, 2004

Mr. Kenneth N. Weinstein
Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

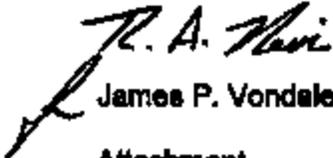
Subject: Ford Recall No. 04S23 – Certain 2003-2004 model year Ford E-Series Vehicles equipped with gasoline engines.

Summary

- Ford Action – Ford Motor Company (Ford) is conducting a voluntary safety recall involving certain 2003-2004 model year E-Series vehicles with gasoline engines to replace the air filter elements.
- Number of Vehicles Involved – Approximately 253,076 vehicles in the United States and Federalized Territories.
- Affect on Vehicle Operation – Changes to the 2003-2004 model year E-Series air filter element material process were implemented by the paper supplier that resulted in an air filter paper element that can smolder or burn. This change in filter paper composition combined with the configuration of the air induction system, may allow hot carbon particles to contact the air filter element during certain driving conditions that create hot particles. These hot particles may ignite the air filter element with the potential for air induction system damage and/or underhood fire. Ford is aware of 18 reports that appear to relate to this condition and allege underhood fire. None of these incidents allege an accident or injury resulting from this condition.
- Service Procedure – Owners will be notified and instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the air filter element replaced.

Attached is the detailed information required by the applicable portions of 49 CFR Part 573 – Defect and Non-Compliance Information Report.

Sincerely,


James P. Vondela

Attachment

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2004 SEP 13 P 12:06
OFFICE OF DIRECTOR
OF INVESTIGATION

04V-445
(3 pages)



49 CFR Part 573 – DEFECT INFORMATION REPORT
04S23 – 2003-2004 MODEL YEAR FORD E-SERIES VEHICLES

Pursuant to Part 573 of Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Defect and Noncompliance Reports, Ford Motor Company (Ford) submits the following information concerning a safety recall action that it is voluntarily initiating.

573.6 (c) (2) - Potentially Affected Vehicles

Vehicles potentially affected are 2003-2004 model year E-Series gasoline engine vehicles built at the Lorain Assembly Plant (LAP) from April 23, 2002 through April 30, 2004.

Because these vehicles are not produced in VIN order, information as to the applicability of this action to specific vehicles can best be obtained by either calling Ford's toll-free line (1-800-392-3673) or by contacting a local Ford dealer who can obtain specific information regarding the vehicles from the Ford On-line Automotive Service Information System (OASIS) database.

573.6 (c) (3) - Estimated Population of Vehicles Potentially Affected

Approximately 253,076 vehicles in the United States and Federalized Territories.

573.6 (c) (4) - Estimated Percentage of Affected Vehicles with the Defect Condition

Unknown

573.6 (c) (5) - Description of the Defect

Changes to the 2003-2004 model year E-Series air filter element material process were implemented by the paper supplier, which resulted in an air filter paper element that can smolder or burn. This change in filter paper composition, combined with the configuration of the air induction system, may allow hot carbon particles to contact the air filter element during certain driving conditions that create hot particles. These hot particles may ignite the air filter element with the potential for air induction system damage and/or underhood fire. Ford is aware of 18 reports that appear to relate to this condition and allege underhood fire. None of these incidents allege an accident or injury resulting from this condition.

573.6 (c) (6) - Chronology of Events

Ford first became aware of six alleged underhood fires on the subject vehicles in November 2003. Investigation into these six reports did not identify the cause of the incidents. However, each incident appeared to be confined to localized damage in the air induction system or immediate area. Based on this review and the suspected limited nature of the damage, there did not appear to be a risk to vehicle safety from this condition. Ford's investigation of the reported E-Series incidents was being conducted at the same time as the investigation that led to Ford's recall 04S11 involving 399,926 Taurus and Sable vehicles. In the Taurus investigation, Ford learned of a material processing change made at the air filter paper supplier that supplied element paper for the 2003 model year air induction system that caused the filter paper to be more susceptible to smoldering and burning. When compared to the Taurus performance, the number of incidents was significantly lower, demonstrating that differences in the air induction system affected the potential for a vehicle fire to occur.

Ford continued to closely monitor the field data to understand the potential for a vehicle fire in the E-Series vehicles (because the change in the air filter paper that was identified for Taurus and Sable vehicles also affected E-Series vehicles) although the E-Series vehicles did not appear to

present the same risk of vehicle fire as did the Taurus and Sable. As potentially relevant reports were received, Ford sought details about each incident to determine whether each report was related to this condition. Through interviews, vehicle and component inspections, and reviews of photographs, Ford has been able to identify eighteen reports of fires that appear to be caused by the ignition of the air filter paper. No accidents or injuries have been reported as of August 25, 2004.

573.6 (c) (8) - Service Program

Owners will be notified and instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the air filter element replaced. There will be no charge to owners for this service. Mailing of owner notification letters will begin October 8, 2004 and be completed on October 8, 2004.

Ford has notified dealers to not demonstrate or deliver the affected vehicles until the service procedure has been performed.

In accordance with Part 573.13 (d)(1), Ford is excluding reimbursement for costs incurred by owners for repair of this problem because Ford's original warranty program provided a free repair for this concern for customers.

573.6 (c) (9) - Press statement and Dealer/Owner Letters

Ford does not at this time plan to make a statement to the media concerning the subject matter of this action. A copy of the notification letters to dealers and owners from Ford will be forwarded to the agency when available.

573.6(c) (11) - Recall Number

Ford has assigned recall number 04S23 to this action.