



July 24, 2018

Administrator
c/o Deputy Administrator Heidi King
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, West Building
Washington, D.C. 20590

ADDENDUM TO PETITION FOR DEFECT INVESTIGATION

Deputy Administrator King:

On June 11, 2018, the Center for Auto Safety (Center) petitioned the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to initiate a safety defect investigation into the excessive number of non-collision fires experienced by owners of 2011-2014 Kia Optima, Sorento, Hyundai Sonata, and Santa Fe vehicles. Today, the Center requests NHTSA also include 2010-2015 Kia Soul vehicles in the investigation. The Center has continued to track non-collision related fires in Kia and Hyundai vehicles since our June 11th petition and found that 2010-2015 Souls are also catching fire at an alarming rate. The Center requests NHTSA act swiftly, as the fire issues plaguing Optimas, Sorentos, Sonatas, and Santa Fes have continued.

I. Non-Collision Related Fires in 2010-2015 Kia Soul Vehicles

In NHTSA's Vehicle Owner Questionnaire (VOQ) database there are 23 reports of non-collision related fires affecting Kia Soul model years 2010-2015 as of July 23.¹ This volume of fire incidents would be concerning for any vehicle but is especially alarming because of the Soul's relatively small population size.² Some typical examples include:

2015 Kia Soul – NHTSA ID No. 10898504

The car caught fire under the hood of the engine. Upon arriving home from grocery store passenger noticed smoke under the hood. The fire was extinguished and the Kia emergency roadside service was called. The local Kia dealer doesn't want anything to do with the car even though the car is still under factory warranty. Kia corporate isn't much help either saying it will be 2-5 business days before someone from there will be able to come and inspect it. In the meantime I am stranded in Fort Wayne with no transportation. Again the car is still under factory warranty!!!!!!!!!!

¹ See <http://www.autosafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Kia-Soul-2010-2015-Fire-Complaints.xlsx>

² According to Kia, 695,683 model years 2010-2015 Souls were sold in the US. See <https://www.kiamedia.com/us/en/sales?by-model>.

2014 Kia Soul – NHTSA ID No. 10626163

We had been driving for about 20 minutes. We pulled off highway to look at a tourist attraction. No indication whatsoever that anything was wrong with the car. Parked, turned car off. Got out. Glanced back at the car and smoke was pouring out from under the hood. Soon there were flames dripping from underneath front end (looked like melting plastic). Called fire department. Within 1 minute flames were jumping up on interior (dash area) and exterior (under hood). Got fire extinguisher from nearby business, but with hood closed, did not help. Within 4 minutes entire front end and front interior were engulfed in enormous flames. Many popping noises (explosions). Fire department arrived after about 5 minutes and extinguished the fire. Entire front end of car melted to the ground. I should note that while we left the car unlocked when we got out, the doors locked themselves during the fire, and the key fob was inoperable (lock electronics in the car were fried). Had a person or pet been in the car, they would have been trapped. My husband cut his face during this, but did not seek a doctor. All personal items in the car are severely damaged by smoke.

In addition to the incidents found in NHTSA's VOQ database, the family of a young man in Virginia recently averted tragedy when his 2012 Kia Soul caught fire as he was driving.³ After hearing a noise and seeing smoke, the young man pulled over and his vehicle was immediately engulfed in flames. His family, of course, hopes that Kia will do right by its customers and make their vehicles safe. Unfortunately, Kia has not shown any willingness to take vehicle fires seriously.

II. Additional Optima, Sorento, Sonata, and Santa Fe fires

Since our June 11th petition, NHTSA's VOQ database shows that 3 Optimas, 9 Sorentos, 4 Sonatas, and 2 Santa Fe fires have been reported, as of July 23, 2018.⁴ Given the rate at which these vehicles have caught fire over the last few years, this should come as no surprise, but is nonetheless terrifying.

In NHTSA's June 26, 2018, letter to Senator Bill Nelson replying to his letter that accompanied the Center's petition, NHTSA stated that it is investigating fires in Kia and Hyundai vehicles.⁵ NHTSA's letter indicated that Kia vehicles are subject to the RQ17-003 investigation and Hyundai vehicles subject to the RQ17-004 investigation. While the Center appreciates these efforts, those investigations are related to vehicles subject to Recall Numbers 17V-224, 15V-568, and 17V-226,⁶ and the evidence suggest that many of the fires are caused by

³ Shelby Brown, *Powhatan Family Wants Kia to Investigate Vehicle Fire: 'Thank God, Our Kid is OK'*, WTVR (July 19, 2018), <https://wtvr.com/2018/07/19/powhatan-family-wants-kia-to-investigate-vehicle-fire-thank-god-our-kid-is-okay/>.

⁴ See <http://www.autosafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2011-14-Hyundai-Kia-Fire-Complaints-July-23-.xlsx>

⁵ See <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/cache/files/67ef89df-bd82-443f-9308-2d92019b9de5/31DA9E1572023E0F644CBF5AA7417F7C.rm-nelson-kia-hyundai-response---6-26-18.pdf>.

⁶ See June 2018 Monthly Defect Investigation Report, NHTSA, <https://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/downloads/monthlyReports/inv/INVMY-062018-1234.pdf>.

issues unrelated to these recalls.⁷ Moreover, neither the investigation memos for RQs 17-003 and 17-004, nor any of the related recall notifications, use the word “fire.”

As if to emphasize the need to open an investigation into these fires, the Center recently received a complaint from a 2014 Sorento owner who had her vehicle serviced under the 17V-224 and the vehicle caught fire thereafter. This is but one example showing these recalls do not sufficiently address the fire risk. Also, these recalls do not include all vehicles that experience non-collision related fires at an abnormal rate, notably the 2011 Kia Sorento.⁸ It is imperative that NHTSA expand its investigations beyond those cited in its June 26th letter to include *all* 2011-2014 Kia Optimas, Sorentos, Hyundai Sonatas, and Santa Fes, as well as all 2010-2015 Kia Souls, and do so quickly.

III. Conclusion

To summarize the facts as of July 23, 2018 per NHTSA/VOQ database, there have been at least:

- 39 non-collision 2011-2014 Kia Sorento fires
- 36 non-collision 2011-2014 Kia Optima fires
- 23 non-collision 2010-2015 Kia Soul Fires
- 51 non-collision 2011-2014 Hyundai Sonata fires
- 12 non-collision 2011-14 Hyundai Santa Fe fires
- 161 non-collision fires total

It is only a matter of time before one of these clearly defective vehicles claims the life of one or more of its occupants or someone who shares the road with them. The Center urges NHTSA to utilize its statutory authority to force Kia and Hyundai to recall these vehicles and remedy the defect (or defects) causing them to catch on fire. Until then, Kia and Hyundai owners, and those who share the road with them, face the horrifying risk of serious injury and death by fire.

Sincerely,



Jason Levine
Executive Director

⁷ These recalls relate to restricted oil flow due to debris in the vehicles' engines. *See* NHTSA Recall No. 17V-224, <https://static.nhtsa.gov/odi/rcr/2017/RCLRPT-17V224-2355.PDF>; NHTSA Recall No. 15V-568, <https://static.nhtsa.gov/odi/rcr/2015/RCLRPT-15V568-9490.PDF> and NHTSA Recall No. 17V-226, <https://static.nhtsa.gov/odi/rcr/2017/RCLRPT-17V226-4558.pdf>.

⁸ As of July 23, there were 11 non-collision related fire complaints for the 2011 Kia Sorento in NHTSA's VOQ database.