



Second Company Could Be Providing Defective Airbag Inflators

U.S. safety regulators are investigating airbag inflators made by ARC Automotive Inc. that went into about 420,000 older Fiat Chrysler Town and Country minivans and another 70,000 Kia Optima midsize sedans. The news from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) comes just weeks after Takata agreed to recall 33.8 million inflators in the U.S. in the largest automotive recall in American history.

The safety agency said it received a complaint in December about a 2009 incident in a 2002 Chrysler minivan but determined it was an isolated case involving an ARC driver's side inflator. Then in June, Kia told the agency about a lawsuit involving a 2004 Optima in New Mexico with an ARC inflator, so NHTSA decided to open an investigation. Both cases are the only known incidents involving ARC inflators in vehicles made by either automaker.

According to NHTSA Administrator Mark Rosekind, the agency has opened up an investigation and will seek a recall if any connection is found. The investigation also will determine how many of the suspect ARC inflators are on the road, NHTSA said.

ARC makes inflators that are used by other companies in air bag systems. The inflators use an inert gas to fill the air bag, which is supplemented by an ammonium nitrate propellant. According to NHTSA, a preliminary analysis of the Chrysler minivan system showed that the path for the inflator gas to exit the inflator may have been blocked by an unknown object.

In the Takata cases, ammonium nitrate is the main propellant, and it can become unstable over time when exposed to high humidity and temperatures. The chemical can burn too fast and blow apart a metal inflator canister. Automakers, NHTSA and Takata are trying to find the exact cause of the defect.

According to NHTSA, ARC made inflators for Delphi Corp. airbags that were sold to Kia and used in Optimas, and it made them for Key Safety Systems airbags sold to Chrysler and used in minivans.