

Ed McCabe - Smithfield, RI 2/10/06

For the sixth time in the past year we have reported conclusive evidence to a client that a vehicle built by FoMoCo caught fire due to a defect in its brake master cylinder mounted Cruise Control knock off switch.

This last vehicle was a '97 Mercury Mountaineer which has not yet been recalled - but certainly should have been as its switch is identical to those installed on the master cylinder of the 1,000,000 plus FoMoCo vehicles manufactured from 1992 to 2003 which have already been recalled.

The Mountaineer was the first instance where the vehicle was in operation when the fire started. All the others were parked with the key off.

Be aware that these fires can start under any circumstances and that the first indication is at the LR corner of the engine compartment.

A Ford document obtained by CNN indicates that 16 million vehicles were manufactured with the same or a similar switch.

Below is a CNN release on the Cruise Control fires and photos of an EXEMPLAR unburned Mountaineer and the one which burned due to the switch defect. The previous vehicles investigated were far more severely burned than this one, which I consider to be a classic scenario of a fire caused by the Cruise Control Deactivation switch.

EXEMPLAR



TOP VIEW



FRONT VIEW



## EXPANDED INVESTIGATION

The \$20.57 switch shuts off the cruise control when the driver firmly steps on the brakes. The switch is located under the hood of the vehicle and is attached to the brake master cylinder on one end and the cruise control on the other.

On most of its models, Ford designed the switch to be powered – or hot – at all times, even when the vehicle is off and the key is removed from the ignition.

Inside the switch, a thin film barrier separates brake fluid from the switch's electrical components. Investigators say fires can occur when the film cracks and brake fluid from the master cylinder seeps into the electrical portion of the switch.

The first recall was in May 1999, affecting 279,000 Crown Victorias, Grand Marquises and Town cars for model years 1992 and 1993. The second, issued in January 2005, affected 792,000 vehicles, including model year 2001 F-Series SuperCrews and 2000 Expeditions, Navigators and F-150 pickups.

But a Ford document obtained by CNN shows the same or similar switch was installed in a total of 16 million vehicles, far beyond what was recalled. Those vehicles include:

Mark VII/VIII from 1994-1998

Taurus/Sable and Taurus SHO 2.3L 1993-1995

Econoline 1992-2003

F-Series 1993-2003

Windstar 1994-2003

Explorer without IVD 1995-2003

Explorer Sport/Sport Trac 2002-2003

Expedition 1997-2003

Ranger 1995-2003

In March the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration opened an expanded investigation into more than 3/7 million vehicles.

NHTSA says that it has received 559 complaints of spontaneous fires. 253 of them in unrecalled models, and its latest investigation includes the 1995 model years of the F-150, Expedition and Lincoln Navigator vehicles.

## RECALLED

2002 Blackwood

1994-1996 Bronco

1992-1993 Crown Victoria

1997-2002 Expedition

1994-2002 F-150 pickups

1994-1999 F-250 pickups

2001 F-Series Supercrew

1992-1993 Grand Marquis

1998-2002 Navigator

1092-1993 Town car

#### HAVE THE SAME OR SIMILAR SWITCH

1993 Bronco  
1994-1997 Crown Victoria  
1992-2002 Econoline  
2000-2002 Excursion  
1998-2001 Explorer  
2001-2002 Explorer Sport  
1993 F-Series Pickups  
1995-2002 F53 Motorhome  
1994-1998 Grand Marquis  
1993-1998 Mark VII/VIII  
1992-2002 Mountaineer  
1998-2002 Ranger  
1993-1995 Taurus/Sable  
1994-1997 Town Car  
1994-2002 Windstar

Ford says that it has initiated its own investigation and is cooperating with the NHYSA probe

“We have identified specific populations of vehicles in which the speed-control deactivation switches have had increasing rates of failures and fires,” said Ford spokeswoman Kristen Kinley in a written response to questions submitted by CNN.

“When we have seen the fire reports increasing, we have recalled these vehicles and replaced those switches. Ford has used the basic switch design in a large number of vehicles and the risk of fire related to the switch is much different in those certain populations that we have recalled.”

She added, : It is important to understand that. All speed control systems are not identical in Ford vehicles .... In those populations with an increasing fire report rate, we stopped using the switch through the recall process....The switch has performed well in many models for many years.

In another statement to CNN, Kinley said “we have been asked why we have not expanded the recall. The last thing we want to do is make an important safety decision on incorrect or incomplete information.”

Kinley also said, “We have not determined at this time that there is a defect with the switch, but for reasons we do not understand the switch is failing...and we are trying to understand why.”

## FORD NO LONGER USES SWITCH

But, in a recall notice to owners of 2000 F-150s, Expeditions, Navigators and 2001 F-150 SuperCrews, the company seems less equivocal about the switch. The “switch may overheat, smoke or burn which could result in an underhood fire,” it said. “This condition may occur either when the vehicle is parked or when it is being operated, even if the speed control is not in use.’

The company stopped using the switch altogether as of the 2004 model year. And is using a new design.