



Toyota Alleged to Keep Tight Lid on Potential Safety Problems

Written On December 31, 2009 By [Bob Kraft](#)

An extensive investigation by the [Los Angeles Times](#) shows what that newspaper says is a deliberate attempt by automaker Toyota to deny vehicle defects and delay product recalls. The entire article is well worth reading. These are only the opening paragraphs:

During a routine test on its Sienna minivan in April 2003, Toyota Motor Corp. engineers discovered that a plastic panel could come loose and cause the gas pedal to stick, potentially making the vehicle accelerate out of control.

The automaker redesigned the part and by that June every 2004 model year Sienna off the assembly line came with the new panel. Toyota did not notify tens of thousands of people who had already bought vans with the old panel, however.

It wasn't until U.S. safety officials opened an investigation last year that Toyota acknowledged in a letter to regulators that the part could come loose and "lead to unwanted or sudden acceleration."

In January, nearly six years after discovering the potential hazard, the automaker recalled 26,501 vans made with the old panel.

In a statement to The Times, Toyota said that there was no defect in the Sienna and that "a safety recall was not deemed necessary" when it discovered the problem in 2003. The company called the replacement part "an additional safety measure."

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A peerless reputation for quality and safety has helped Toyota become the world's largest automaker. But even as its sales have soared, the company has delayed recalls, kept a tight lid on disclosure of potential problems and attempted to blame human error in cases where owners claimed vehicle defects.

The automaker's handling of safety issues has come under scrutiny in recent months because of incidents of sudden acceleration in Toyota and Lexus vehicles, which The Times has reported were involved in accidents causing 19 fatalities since 2001, more deaths from that problem than all other automakers combined.

After Toyota this fall announced its biggest recall to address the sudden-acceleration problem, it insisted publicly that no defect existed. That drew a rare public rebuke from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which chastised the automaker for making "inaccurate and misleading statements."

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