



## NHTSA Seeking Record Fine for Sticky Toyota Gas Pedals

*Written On April 7, 2010 By [Bob Kraft](#)*

Here's a roundup of stories relating to the news that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is trying to fine Toyota a maximum \$16.4 million for failing to report accelerator problems in a timely manner. This is from the American Association for Justice news release.

The announcement that NHTSA will seek the maximum possible penalty from Toyota—over \$16 million—in its faulty accelerator case generated significant coverage, with reports on all three network news broadcasts and heavy reporting in major papers, wire services, and news sites. ABC World News reported that the government “accused Toyota of, in essence, a cover up, proposing to hit the company with a \$16 million fine. The announcement said Toyota had five days to report problems with sticking gas pedals but instead waited months to take action.” ABC quotes former NHTSA administrator Joan Claybrook calling the announcement a “black eye” for the automaker, and adds that Secretary LaHood “blasted” Toyota “for knowingly hiding a dangerous defect. He accused Toyota of failing to ‘take action to protect millions of drivers and their families.’”

NBC Nightly News reported that DOT said “it is hitting Toyota with a fine for failing to report accelerator problems to safety officials in a timely manner.” The piece quotes LaHood as saying, “Toyota failed to live up to its legal obligations. Worst yet, they

Kraft & Associates  
2777 Stemmons Freeway  
Suite 1300  
Dallas, Texas 75207  
Toll Free: (800) 989-9999  
FAX: (214) 637-2118  
E-mail: [info@kraftlaw.com](mailto:info@kraftlaw.com)

knowingly hit a dangerous defect for months from US officials,” adding that “Toyota responded to the fine saying ‘we have already taken a number of important steps to improve our communications with regulators and customers on safety-related matters as part of our strengthened overall commitment to quality assurance.’” The CBS Evening News in a brief report, noted that “Toyota is expected to appeal.”

The AP, noting that the government “accused Toyota of hiding a ‘dangerous defect,’” reports that LaHood announced the proposed fine yesterday, and that it “is the most the government could levy for the sticking gas pedals that have led Toyota to recall millions of vehicles.” Meanwhile, Toyota “faces private lawsuits seeking many millions more. ... Documents obtained from the automaker show that Toyota knew of the problem with the sticking gas pedals in late September but did not issue a recall until late January, LaHood said.”

The Washington Post reports that should the fine be approved, it “would represent the largest financial penalty imposed by the U.S. government on an automaker. The fine could rise” should the government find other related violations on Toyota’s part. ” if the government’s ongoing investigation into runaway Toyotas turns up violations related to other defects, officials said.” The Post also notes LaHood’s statement, noting that a Toyota spokesperson said that company has yet to decide whether to appeal the fine.

The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News, USA Today, and Reuters also cover this story.

Accepting fine could look like admission of guilt. In a late-breaking analysis, the AP reports that given its existing legal issues, Toyota “faces a dilemma...:whether to accept a record \$16.4 million fine that could be cast as an admission of wrongdoing, or fight the government at the cost of more bad publicity.”

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E-mail: [info@kraftlaw.com](mailto:info@kraftlaw.com)

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Suite 1300  
Dallas, Texas 75207  
Toll Free: (800) 989-9999  
FAX: (214) 637-2118  
E-mail: [info@kraftlaw.com](mailto:info@kraftlaw.com)