



U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

DOT Auto Safety Hotline
Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire
To Report Vehicle Safety Defects
1-888-DASH-2-DOT
(1-888-327-4236)
INTERNET www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline

FOR AGENCY USE ONLY 100161

Date Received

Repository

2003 MAY 28 AM 10:46

Reference No.
10017180

OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print)

Name

Address

City AMHERST

State MA

Zip Code

Daytime Telephone Number

E-mail Address

Evening Telephone Number

Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of this report to the manufacturer of your vehicle? YES NO
In the absence of an authorization, NHTSA WILL NOT provide your name or address to the vehicle manufacturer.

Signature of Owner

Date / /

VEHICLE INFORMATION

Make TOYOTA	Model COROLLA	Model Year 1995
Date Purchased	Dealer's Name and Telephone Number	Engine: No: Cylinders
Original Owner <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dealer's City	Fuel Type:
State	Zip Code	
Transmission Type <input type="checkbox"/> Antilock Brakes <input type="checkbox"/> Cruise Control	Powertrain	Vehicle Component Code 072200 FUEL SYSTEM, GASOLINE: DELIVERY: HOSES, LINES/PIPING, & MULTIPLE FAILURE:

FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION

Incident Date(s)	Failure Mileage	Failure Speed	SEE ENCLOSED LETTER
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ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A TIRE FAILURE

Tire Make	Tire Model (Name or Number)	Tire Size (Example P215/65R15)
DOT No. (Example: DOTM159A8C036)	<input type="checkbox"/> Original Equipment <input type="checkbox"/> Prior Repair	Failure Location:
Tire Component Code	Tire Failure Type	

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A CHILD SEAT FAILURE

Make:	Date Manufactured:	Model No./Name:
Seat Type:	Installation System:	
Child Seat Component Code:	Failed Part:	

APPLICABLE INCIDENT INFORMATION

(Please describe in detail the incident(s), failure(s), crash(es), and injury(ies).)

Crash <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Fire <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Number of Persons Injured	Number of Deaths	Reported to Police N
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Narrative Description of Incident(s), Crash(es), and Injury(ies).
Please describe (1) events leading up to the failure, (2) failure and its consequences, and (3) what was done to correct the failure; i.e., parts repaired or replaced (and if old part is available).

THE VEHICLE LEAKED GASOLINE. THE VEHICLE WAS TAKEN TO A MECHANIC WHO STATED THE FUEL LINE HAD TO BE REPLACED. *NLM

Include, if available: Police/Fire Department Report, Photos, and Repair Invoice.

ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY

The Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-502) This information is requested pursuant to authority vested in the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and subsequent amendments. You are under no obligation to respond to this questionnaire. Your responses may be used to assist the NHTSA in determining whether a manufacturer should take appropriate action to correct a safety defect. If the NHTSA proceeds with an administrative enforcement or litigation against a manufacturer, your response, or a statistical summary thereof, may be used in support of the agency's action.

May 12, 2003

Amherst, MA. [REDACTED]

United States Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Office of Defects Investigation, NVS - 216
400 7th Avenue, SW
Washington D.C.

Dear Sir Ms:

Approximately three weeks ago, my 1995 Toyota Corolla fuel system failed. Normally, I would not seek redress from your agency or from the Toyota Corporation for a vehicle with 145,000 miles. Indeed, I have never complained to any manufacturer of a vehicle I have owned about problems that resulted from "normal wear and tear," including clutch replacement, coolant system problems, brakes, shocks and many other parts that required replacement. I do have a problem, however, with the Toyota Corporation's failure to seriously evaluate what I believe may be a design flaw and which may be dangerous. If my contention about this defect is correct, the Toyota Corporation's position is irresponsible and represents a breach of the warranties of "merchantability and fitness for use."

Before I discuss the particular circumstances underlying my claim, I note that I am a recently retired attorney with extensive experience regarding consumer-related issues. For more than 25 years, I was a senior attorney at the [REDACTED] an agency within the Governor's office that was responsible for representing the interests of individuals and small businesses in all cases involving electric, gas, water and telephone rates as well as claims regarding fraud and misrepresentation of defective products and telemarketing abuse. For the previous ten years, I was an attorney and director of various legal services programs for the Federal Government. I am not a person who litigates all of life's disappointments. In fact, I have virtually never made a claim against a seller of any product I purchased. Instead, on those occasions in which I did have a complaint, I would contact the seller and resolve my problem directly without resorting to outside intervention.

As to my current problem with the Toyota Corporation, this is the first time I have either been unable to achieve an amicable resolution or to even have Toyota seriously consider the basis for my complaint. My problem began a few days prior to April 21, 2003 when I was chatting in front of my house with several neighbors who were visiting with their small children. They told me that they smelled gas from my vehicle and I attempted to locate the source of the problem. Finding nothing, I assumed that the gas cap had been loose or there was some other explanation for this problem. A few days later, other neighbors advised me of a similar odor. However, again I could not readily find the source of this problem. On April 21, 2003, however, I noticed a continuous drip

from beneath the chassis of my car between the front and rear doors. I touched the liquid and smelled it and it seemed to be gasoline.

I immediately drove to Pelham Auto Service, a local and large repair business that regularly services and repairs my vehicles. After examining the leak, I was advised not to move the vehicle because any ignition source, for example a lit and discarded cigarette, could cause my vehicle to become a "Roman Candle." I left my car at this repair location and was called several hours later. I was advised that the fuel lines that were visible resembled a "distillery." I asked if this type of leak was normal for any vehicle that was seven years old and had 145,000 miles. I was told that this problem was odd, had not been observed by them previously on any other vehicle that they serviced, and should not have occurred. After further exploration of the fuel system and removal of my fuel tank, Pelham Auto Service personnel discovered that the problem was worse than they thought and required replacement of all of my fuel lines. They surmised that the material used to manufacture those lines appeared to be subject to corrosion, clearly inappropriate for a climatic zone that has a long winter and in which roads are regularly sanded and salted. I asked if there was any reason to assume that this problem may be specific to my vehicle. I was told that this problem should equally affect all vehicles manufactured with the same fuel system materials. I have attached a bill from Pelham Auto Service that describes the problem they discovered and the cost of the repair.

Upon discovering the nature of this problem on April 21, 2003, I immediately contacted the Toyota Corporation at its central consumer complaint 1-800 number to ask a representative to examine my vehicle and/or the defective parts. During the ensuing telephone conversation, I was given Complaint No. [REDACTED]. During that and future conversations with Toyota personnel over the next several days, I requested that they accurately transcribe the contents of all conversations I had with them regarding my complaint.

In response to my telephone complaints, Toyota representatives explained to me that the company normally does not assume responsibility for any problem with a vehicle with as much mileage as is on my automobile. I responded that normally I would agree with that position. However, I believed that my complaint involved a potential dangerous design defect. I asked the company's representatives to at least send a representative to examine the car. However, after examining their records regarding service recalls, I was told that they would only look at the car if I brought it to a Toyota dealer. I explained that my car was at least ten miles away from a Toyota dealer - Northampton Toyota - and that I was instructed by Pelham Auto Service personnel that it was extremely dangerous to drive the vehicle.

I then contacted Northampton Toyota, where I purchased the vehicle, and spoke to George Leptak, the manager of the auto repair division. He attempted to intercede with Toyota central office personnel to request that they examine my vehicle. However, after several efforts, he advised me that he was unsuccessful. As of this date, neither my vehicle nor the defective parts have been examined by Toyota.

I am concerned that my fuel problem may be indicative of a serious flaw that may effect thousands of Toyota owners who drive their vehicles in the Northeast and that future fuel system failures may end tragically. Toyota's disinterest has astonished me. It would seem to me that any company would appreciate notice of a problem that may result in potential liability in the future.

As to me and my son who have purchased Toyota vehicles over the years as well as other friends and relatives I have directed to Toyota, this situation has raised unpleasant questions about Toyota's interest in its customers and their safety. To those who request my advice in the future, I will explain that the company has an odd attitude toward customer safety and suggest that they consider this fact in their future automobile purchase decisions.

I note that my primary interest here is to determine the safety consequences of this problem and secondarily to ask, if my view of this matter was correct, for Toyota to assume some responsibility for the cost of this repair. I hope that you can intercede regarding this matter. I have retained all of the parts removed from my vehicle and Pelham Auto Service personnel would be willing to discuss the nature of their repairs with your office.

Finally, I will continue to seek redress from senior officials at the Toyota Corporation as well as "Consumer Reports," the Attorney General of the State of Massachusetts, and other public agencies and automotive experts who are interested in advising the public about vehicle safety. This matter could have been resolved quickly and without rancor had Toyota simply been willing to take a small step to consider a problem raised by a long-term owner of that company's vehicles. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

Very truly yours,

**THE ATTACHMENTS TO THIS
DOCUMENT HAVE BEEN REMOVED
TO PROTECT UNWARRANTED
INVASION OF PERSONAL PRIVACY
PURSUANT TO EXEMPTION 6 OF
THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
ACT (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(6).**