

Jimenez, Alberto <NHTSA>

From: Jimenez, Alberto <NHTSA>
Sent: Tuesday, June 13, 2006 2:58 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Airbag Deployment Question

From: Test, Crash <NHTSA>
Sent: Tuesday, June 13, 2006 11:51 AM
To: Jimenez, Alberto <NHTSA>
Subject: Airbag Deployment Question

10160319

Thank you for your e-mail dated June 13, 2006, concerning your model year (MY) 2004 Honda Element. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) received your correspondence and it was referred to the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI).

NHTSA is the Federal agency responsible for improving safety on our Nation's highways. We are authorized to order manufacturers to recall and repair vehicles or items of motor vehicle equipment when our investigations indicate that they contain serious safety defects in their design, construction, or performance. We also monitor the adequacy of manufacturers' recall campaigns. In order for the agency to initiate an investigation, we look carefully at the body of consumer complaints and other available data to determine whether a defect may exist. We cannot act on isolated problems or resolve disputes between individual owners, dealers, or manufacturers.

We appreciate the report you provided. Reports from motorists are a very important source of information for us. Each report is analyzed and entered into a database to determine whether an investigation into a possible safety defect or safety defect recall adequacy is warranted.

A review of our database relative to inadvertent deployment of air bags, specifically the side airbag, on MY 2003 through 2005 Honda Element vehicles revealed no other reports similar to the problem you described. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence to warrant opening a safety defect investigation at this time. The information you provided has been entered into our database. It will be considered with other reports to identify any safety defect trends that may require our attention.

For your information, each manufacturer designs its vehicles so the air bags will deploy if the severity of a crash exceeds a certain threshold. However, there is no Federal requirement establishing a particular threshold. Most manufacturers design their air bags to deploy when the crash severity is in the range of an 8 to 14 mph crash into a fixed solid barrier. This severity is about the same as a crash into another vehicle of equivalent weight at 16 to 28 mph. In lower speed crashes, where the air bag does not deploy, occupant protection is provided by the design of the interior surfaces in the vehicle, as well as by the safety belts provided at each seating position.

Alberto A. Jimenez, Chief
Correspondence Research Division
Office of Defects Investigation
Enforcement

Hello Alberto,

Could you please help answer this consumer's email question at your earliest convenience?

[REDACTED]

Thank you very much,
Dameko America

Hello

I own a 2004 Honda Element AWD vehicle. I was driving up (an incline) a gravel driveway going around 10mph and my passenger side airbag deployed. There is no evidence to the exterior of the car to indicate that something hit me. I called my Honda dealer and told them what happened and they said more than likely I would have to file a claim with my insurance to cover the repair cost, that I probably hit a pot hole. When I dropped the car off for their inspection I was told the same thing. My question is, should it even be possible for one side airbag to go off at such a low speed even if I did hit a pot hole? (I have driven up this same road many times and never had a problem before) I spoke to other car dealerships asking this same question as a hypothetical and they all say "No". I would like some information either way so I at least have some understanding on my own before I speak to the dealership again.

Any information you can forward to me will be appreciated.
Thank you.

[REDACTED]

all
5/13/06