

From: [REDACTED]
To: James.maine@audi.com
Cc: [Audi Loyalty Team; audihawaii@meetauto.com; Fogle, Brenda CTR \(NHTSA\); DataQuality, DataQuality \(NHTSA\); joseph.miller@audi.com; Keogh, Scott; jackie.fenimore@audi.com; ahmed.iqbal@audi.com; assistance@inag.com](#)
Subject: Re: [REDACTED]; March 31, 2017; AM
Date: Wednesday, April 12, 2017 2:57:51 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#) **INFORMATION Redacted PURSUANT TO THE FREEDOM OF**

Dear Mr. Maine, **INFORMATION ACT (FOIA), 5 U.S.C . 552(B)(6)**

I am quite disappointed in your response to my request for assistance in resolving the recall issues with my 2011 Audi Q5S. In spite of your claim that "customers are the cornerstone of our success" and "your satisfaction is extremely important to us", Audi USA and Audi Hawaii jointly don't seem to be interested in providing a satisfactory solution to the multiple recalls on this particular customer's 2011 Audi Q5S.

I would like to begin by pointing out that I, on the other hand, have been a loyal Audi customer for over a decade, having previously been the owner of a 1999 Audi A4 Quattro Avant prior to purchasing my current Q5S. I made my decision to purchase the A4 based on the engineering, performance, handling and reputation of the Audi brand. My experience with that car, at the time, was the basis for my decision years later to purchase the Q5S. For a period of time I was exclusively a two Audi owner. In various locations that I resided on the mainland, I have always been able to find reputable service facilities capable of providing routine maintenance as well as required repairs for my Audis.

I first encountered problems in having my Audis serviced when I moved to the Big Island of Hawaii for reasons of my employment. I was soon to find out that there is no factory authorized Audi service facility on the Big Island, the nearest one being located in Honolulu, 163 air miles from Kona airport and 132 nautical miles by sea from the harbor nearest to where I reside. Having previously had good experiences with independent service facilities, I was able to locate a local service facility for routine maintenance. In fact it turned out to be the authorized service facility for your corporate sibling, Volkswagen, so I had confidence that they would be able to provide any support that I might need for my Audis. That confidence was shaken when I encountered a problem with the charging system of my A4. The problem was ultimately traced to the circuit in the instrument cluster required to signal the voltage regulator to charge the battery. In spite of the availability of a replacement instrument cluster, the repair facility, as they explained to me, was unable to perform the repair because they lacked authorization and the computer link to match the new instrument cluster to the vehicle ECU. Without this code matching, the vehicle would be inoperable because of the immobilizer function related to the ECU. This inability was in spite of the fact that they were capable of performing the very same function and repairs on a Volkswagen Passat, which I understand to be based on the same corporate "platform" as the Audi A4. They had the factory training and equipment, but not the "authorization" to obtain the necessary codes via computer link with Audi USA. Upon learning this, I contacted both Audi USA and Audi Honolulu to determine if there was a possible workaround for this problem. Audi USA indicated that it was up to Audi Honolulu to work with customers in its sales and service territory on any factory authorized service issues. Audi Honolulu was completely unwilling to explore alternatives to their established policies on who and where factory authorized service could be performed. They refused to consider granting the authorized Volkswagen repair facility temporary authorization to perform the code matching procedure. Having asked what would be involved in the local repair facility becoming an authorized Audi repair facility, they were informed that they would

be required among other things to purchase the immobilizer coding equipment, of which they already had a set, at a cost in the neighborhood of \$20,000. This would not be financially prudent for them given the number of Audis that they see on an annual basis, and for which they would require this equipment, especially in view of the fact that they already had a set of the required equipment. Audi Honolulu would not consider the possibility of allowing an Audi factory trained technician to travel to the Big Island to perform the procedure either with the required equipment at the Volkswagen service facility or potentially with portable equipment that might be capable of performing the procedure. The only approach allowable, by policy, was to have the car transported by cargo ship from the Big Island to Honolulu, an approach that would incur a cost of approximately \$400-\$500 each way in addition to parts and labor to install and code match the replacement instrument cluster. This approach was not economically viable, as the round trip and repair cost would exceed the retail value of the vehicle at that point in time. At about this time, in searching Audi Owner Forums and talking with an independent repair facility on the mainland, I became aware of a well known workaround to bypass the immobilizer circuit, but I was unable to find a local service facility who was familiar with this workaround or willing to undertake it. The local Volkswagen repair facility acted as a good corporate citizen and refused on the basis that it could not be certain that the workaround would not cause to other unforeseen problems. After several discussions with Audi Honolulu and the passage of nearly a year, it became apparent that my only viable option was to retire the otherwise still serviceable vehicle and donate it to a charity, with the potential that it could be used by someone as a donor vehicle, and I could use it as a charitable income tax deduction. I am now no longer a satisfied two Audi owner.

Having just rid myself of the immobile A4, I was soon to learn that the 2011 Q5S had been determined to be a part of the Takata air bag recall. Now my only remaining vehicle was at risk to result in my death or serious injury should I continue to drive it and possibly be involved in an accident that would cause the air bag to deploy. (I was able to verify this through the NHTSA website with my VIN. I was not however notified by Audi USA or any other Audi representative, of the danger should I continue to drive the vehicle.) Once again I contacted both Audi USA and Audi Honolulu as to how they intended to respond to the recall notice and perform the necessary air bag replacement. I was informed that Audi USA had not yet decided how they were going to replace the potentially defective air bags, nor did they have a time frame by which they would have formulated a plan. When asked what I as a customer should do, they recommended continuing to drive the car. They recommended against disabling or removing the air bag, even though I live in a climate with high temperature and humidity that has been determined to increase the risk of injury or death in the event of air bag deployment. Their rationale was that nobody had been killed yet in an Audi air bag incident. Upon the recommendation of other auto safety experts, for my safety and the security of my family, I decided that I should discontinue use of the vehicle. Once again, discussions with Audi Honolulu revealed that they had no intentions of providing assistance with loaner or temporary rental vehicles. Any temporary or permanent replacement vehicles they stated were the responsibility of the customer. The prospect of being able to trade-in the vehicle or sell it at anything close to its previous market value was severely limited by the existence of the airbag defect and unresolved recall plan. The most that they were willing to offer was some financial assistance to ship the vehicle to Honolulu and to accept it as a trade-in on a newer similar vehicle not affected by the recall. This was hardly a viable option given my outstanding loan on the vehicle and their trade-in value estimate, and even if I was willing to purchase another Audi in spite of the uncertainty surrounding my ability to have factory authorized service performed in the vicinity of my residence. It would be irrational to purchase such a vehicle with the prospect of having to add \$1000.00 to the cost every time it

required factory authorized service. Based on the above consideration, I therefore purchased another vehicle at my own expense to use in the interim while awaiting Audi USA and Audi Honolulu to determine what they intended to do to remedy the airbag defect. At the present time, nine months later, my Q5S remains in storage. In the meantime I have discovered that there are two additional safety recalls on my vehicle related to a potential crack in the fuel pump flange and sunroof drain issues.

As to the current air bag solution offered by your prior letter, it does not satisfactorily address my situation. Firstly, it requires that I incur approximately \$1000.00 in transportation cost to remedy a defect that is completely the responsibility of Takata and Audi. Furthermore, that remedy is only to implement an interim replacement of the air bag with a newer similar air bag to reduce the probability of injury in the event of the air bag deploying. The implication is that this transportation cost would be required a second time when the final remedy is available at a future undefined date; and so on with regard to any future safety related recalls. Your policy of requiring the owner to take responsibility for transportation to the nearest factory authorized Audi repair facility, while reasonable for most locations on the U.S. mainland, is completely inadequate in addressing the needs of any Audi owner in Hawaii not resident on the island of Oahu. In trying to investigate alternative approaches, I have been able to determine that many other automobile manufacturers subject to the Takata air bag recall have developed more accommodating policies for their affected owners. One of your main competitors in the SUV market, BMW, have a local dealership and have been very responsive in replacing air bags in affected cars. Similarly GM, Ford, Nissan/Infiniti, Honda/Acura, and Toyota/Lexus all have dealerships in nearby Kona and have performed the recall services for their customers without regard to brand and model. Your new corporate sibling, Porsche, which does not have a dealership on the Big Island, is part of a dealership network that has a Honda dealership in Kona. They have used this dealership network to make an arrangement whereby on a regular schedule a factory trained technician travels to the Honda dealer's facility to to perform service procedures which require his expertise and/or any specialized equipment. Given that there is a factory authorized Volkswagen service facility, equipped with much if not all, of the specialized equipment that might be needed to perform repairs to many Audi models, including my Q5S, a similar arrangement would certainly be feasible in this case. If specialized knowledge were required, it should be possible to remotely consult with the local Volkswagen technician or to have an Audi technician travel to this facility to perform the required service. I'm sure that suitable financial compensation between facilities could be negotiated. It is my understanding that for the immediate situation involving these three safety recalls, no specialized knowledge or tools are required. Indeed, various Audi models have undoubtedly been involved in accidents on the Big Island, where the air bags were deployed and repairs were made, including replacement of the deployed air bags. I have in fact been provided a quote from a local body shop for the replacement of the recalled air bags should I choose to replace them at my own expense rather than acquire an interim replacement vehicle. I am certain that the technicians in my local area are capable of replacing the fuel pump or handling the remedy for plugged sunroof drain holes. In short, it should not be necessary to incur the added \$1000.00 cost of transporting my Q5S to Honolulu to have these recall services performed.

If we cannot reach some sort of accommodation along the lines described above, it will be my intention to investigate options with the FTC along the lines of Audi USA operating an illegal monopoly vis-a-vis allowing only Audi Honolulu to perform required safety recall related repairs on Audi vehicles in its sales district. It is not reasonable to declare the Big Island of Hawaii to be in Audi Honolulu's territory if they have no way of performing factory

authorized service on the Big Island. I should also note that I have many family members, friends, former classmates and business associates who will be aware of how Audi USA choses to respond to my request for assistance. I have found Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Audi Owner Forums to be very effective platforms for communicating with my many relatives and acquaintances.

I have enjoyed owning my Q5S, and the A4 Avant that I had previously, for all of the reasons that I bought them initially. But regrettably the issues that I have had in getting factory authorized service has negated nearly all of that enjoyment. I would therefore respectfully request that you look at modifying your policy regarding where the recall service must be performed and consider accommodating my needs to have these repairs performed at a service facility on the Big Island. I could then return to the ranks of satisfied Audi customers.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

On Fri, Mar 31, 2017 at 11:20 AM, Maine, James <extern.James.Maine@audi.com> wrote:

Reference [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for contacting the Audi Customer Experience Center regarding your 2011 Audi Q5. I truly regret your ownership experience has not fully met your expectations. Here at Audi of America, we believe that our customers are the cornerstone of our success, and your satisfaction is extremely important to us. I understand you were seeking assistance with the transportation of your vehicle to Audi Honolulu for recall repairs.

We understand your concerns surrounding this situation. Audi of America has the ability to perform an interim repair to replace the drive frontal airbag inflator with a newly manufactured version.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has concluded, based on information it has collected, that the age of the inflator, temperature cycling, and environmental moisture are likely the root cause of rupturing. Therefore, replacing the older inflator with a newer version reduces the safety risk associated with the vehicle until a final remedy is available.

All vehicles repaired with this interim remedy will be offered a free-of-charge final remedy at a future date. Customers will be notified again via first-class mail when the final remedy is available.

In order to complete this repair, you must present your vehicle to an authorized Audi dealership. I would encourage you to make an appointment at your convenience. As shared with you in our previous telephone conversations we are unable to meet your expectation of transporting your vehicle to the dealership for any recalls.

You are a valued member of our Audi family, [REDACTED]. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us directly regarding your requests.

Kindest regards,

Adam Maine

Region Case Expert, Audi CXC

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