

[REDACTED]

May 13, 2023

Ms. Ann Carlson
Acting Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

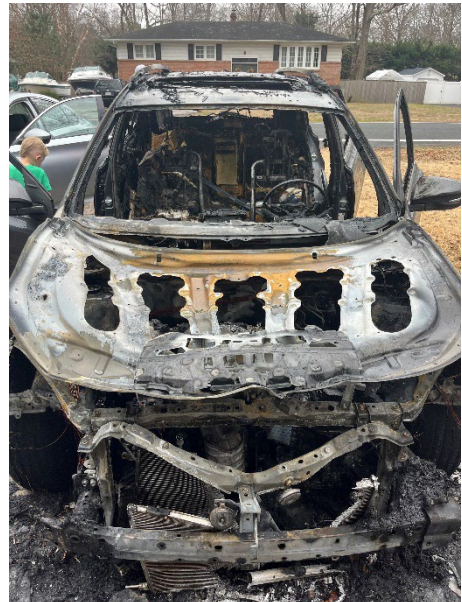
Re: NHTSA Action Number: PE21005 (Toyota RAV4 Fires Originating from Battery Area)

Dear Acting Administrator Carlson:

I am writing to express my serious concern about the **ongoing Toyota RAV4 fire investigation** referenced above. As you know, on **February 2021**, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) opened this investigation covering **1.9 million Toyota RAV4 vehicles** after an abnormal number of engine fires were reported in vehicles with model years 2013-2018. Based on my research, reports continue to be sent to NHTSA (including my family's report, which we filed exactly two years to the date after the investigation was opened), and this investigation has taken **more than four times longer than expected**.



On February 25, 2023, my husband packed our 2015 RAV4 with cupcakes, decorations, and goodie bags for my 7-year-old son's birthday party and let the engine warm-up in our driveway. Fewer than 5 minutes later, as we prepared to walk out the door to go to the party, a passerby pounded on the door to warn us that the car was in flames. We rushed outside, and as one neighbor called the fire department, I called another neighbor who is a firefighter herself. She sprinted down the street and after we tried and failed to save the cupcakes and goodie bags (yes, that's what moms think about first), she started hosing a bush down to prevent the fire from spreading to our house. Later, a responding



firefighter pulled me aside and said, **"Captain Jenny would never brag about this, but I'm telling you right now: her hosing that bush down saved your house from catching fire."** The RAV4, our car that brought my son home from the hospital, burned to the ground in our driveway as we prepared to leave for his 7th birthday party. Five minutes later, we would have been in the car, on the highway, putting ourselves and others in grave danger.

Later that night, instead of relaxing with a happy birthday boy, we filed insurance claims and safety reports with Toyota and the NHTSA. Toyota responded promptly: a positive sign, we thought. Our insurance company called a few days later and as part of the conversation, the representative indicated that they had never seen a car manufacturer request custody of a shell of a vehicle so quickly for investigation. We were hopeful that Toyota would give us some answers about why a car with no history of mechanical problems would spontaneously combust in a driveway. They promised a prompt and satisfactory response to our safety report, within 60 days.

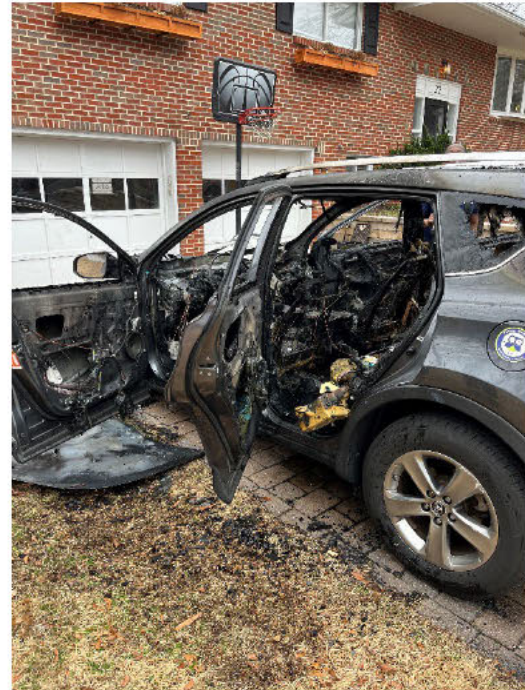
Unfortunately, what we received on the 60th day was little more than a form letter. They did not provide us with any details about the investigation, only a recitation of unrelated minor collisions years prior and a statement that the car was missing the oil cap and the oil level was empty at the time of inspection. As you can see from the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], SEVERNA PARK, MD [REDACTED]

NHTSA-230718-008

attached photos, it is inconceivable why that was a relevant detail, as the entire engine cavity was destroyed. It seems to be an attempt to encourage anyone who read the letter without seeing the photos to believe that a lack of oil could have been a contributing factor. The letter also references a consumer advisory about after-market battery installation problems that could cause a vehicle fire and service at a third-party. We never replaced the battery in this car (a fact that we can't prove because our maintenance records were destroyed in the fire), and we never used any facility other than reputable ones like Jiffy Lube and USAA-selected body shops. The letter from Toyota indicates there is "no evidence from the inspection to indicate that this incident was a result of a vehicle 'defect.'" The fact that their letter puts "defect" in quotation marks is an insult, seeing as there is an open investigation into their product and millions of vehicle owners are potentially at risk.



Your investigation is now our only hope to hold Toyota accountable and ensure the millions of other RAV4 owners are protected from serious danger.

I understand that investigations take time, but to date, this investigation has taken more than four times longer than expected (according to your website, "NHTSA works to complete ... Preliminary Evaluation within eight months": [REDACTED]). I hope your investigation will conclude soon and either hold Toyota accountable or give families like mine some peace of mind knowing that others are not at risk.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

cc: Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
Senator Ted Cruz, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
Senator Gary Peters, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Maritime, Freight, and Ports
Senator Todd Young, Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Maritime, Freight, and Ports
Representative Sam Graves, Chair, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Representative Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Representative Rick Crawford, Chair, House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
Senator Ben Cardin, Maryland
Senator Chris Van Hollen, Maryland
Representative John Sarbanes, Maryland 3rd Congressional District
Toyota Legal One Claims Group, 6565 Headquarters Drive, Plano, TX 75024

[REDACTED]
Severna Park, MD [REDACTED]

SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN'S

PRIVACY RELEASE

The Privacy Act of 1974, Title 5, U.S. Code Section 552a, provides that as of September 27, 1975, disclosure of information of a personal or confidential nature of an individual will no longer be released to third parties without written consent of the individual concerned. Therefore, I hereby grant Senator Chris Van Hollen and his staff my written permission to intercede on my behalf. I also duly authorize that any information that is contained in my records and necessary to provide a substantive response may be disclosed to the Office of Senator Van Hollen.

Name: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]
Severna Park, Maryland [REDACTED]

Email Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone Numbers: Home: [REDACTED]

Work:

Mobile:

PLEASE STATE THE NATURE OF YOUR REQUEST, PROBLEM OR COMPLAINT AND HOW YOU WOULD LIKE THE SENATOR TO ASSIST YOU. PLEASE BE SPECIFIC AND, IF NECESSARY, ATTACH A SHORT LETTER AND/OR COPIES OF ANY RELEVANT DOCUMENTS OR NOTICES.

NHTSA has been investigating Toyota RAV4 model years 2013-2018 for over two years with no public updates. My 2015 RAV4 spontaneously caught fire in our driveway and nearly caught our house on fire and put our family's lives at risk (see attached letter for more details). Millions of these cars are on the road. Every time I see one on the road, I think about how the driver and occupants could be at risk. NHTSA needs to clear Toyota or hold them accountable. PLEASE find out why NHTSA is silent on this issue and ensure they have the resources they need to conclude their investigation.

Have you contacted any other elected official(s) about your issue? Yes

If so, please list their name(s): Sent attached letter to the House and Senate chairs and ranking members of the committees who have oversight over NHTSA on May 13, 2023

Social Security Number (if applicable):

Case/Account Number/ (if applicable): NHTSA Action Number: PE21005

Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

Passport Ref. No./Destination/Travel Date (if applicable):

Passport Applicant Name (If different than above):

I authorize the Office of Senator Chris Van Hollen to make inquiries on my behalf.

Signature

Date 7/14/2023

From: Caldwell, Megan (NHTSA) <megan.caldwell@dot.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, July 18, 2023 1:11 PM
To: Korkor, Julie (NHTSA) <julie.korkor@dot.gov>
Cc: Lally, Patrick (NHTSA) <patrick.lally@dot.gov>; O'Donnell, Melanie (NHTSA) <Melanie.O'Donnell@dot.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Constituent inquiry - [REDACTED]

Hi Julie,

Please control.

Thank you!
Megan

From: Lee, Langston (Van Hollen) <Langston_Lee@vanhollen.senate.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, July 18, 2023 12:54:24 PM
To: Caldwell, Megan (NHTSA) <megan.caldwell@dot.gov>
Subject: Constituent inquiry - [REDACTED]

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon,

I hope you are well. Please see the attached privacy release [REDACTED] reached out our office about her concerns with the ongoing Toyota RAV4 fire investigation. [REDACTED] in particular caught on fire on February 25, 2023. After this, she filed an investigation request would like to know the status of this investigation.

Would you be able to provide assistance or any recommendations? We would appreciate your reaching out to the constituent and providing our office with a response. If you need additional information, please let me know.

Thank you for your assistance,

Langston

Langston Lee

Office of U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen

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