



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

## ODI RESUME

Investigation: RQ 04-006  
Date Opened: 07/07/2004 Date Closed: 01/13/2005  
Principal Investigator: Mark Swanson  
Subject: Windshield wiper failure

Manufacturer: General Motors Corp.  
Products: 1997-1998 Chevrolet Malibu and Oldsmobile Cutlass  
Population: 124,117

Problem Description: The passenger side wiper pivot housing fails causing the wipers to become inoperative.

### FAILURE REPORT SUMMARY

	ODI	Manufacturer	Total
Complaints:	14	76	90
Crashes/Fires:	0	0	0
Injury Incidents:	0	0	0
# Injuries:	0	0	0
Fatality Incidents:	0	0	0
# Fatalities:	0	0	0
Other*:	18	0	18

\*Description of Other: Complaints from owners located in recall states

Action: The investigation has been closed.

Engineer: Mark B. Swanson *MS*  
Div. Chief: Thomas Z. Cooper  
Office Dir.: Kathleen C. DeMeter

Date: 01/13/2005  
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Summary: In March 2001, GM notified NHTSA that it is conducting a safety recall (NHTSA number 01V068) on certain model year (MY) 1997-1998 Chevrolet Malibu and Oldsmobile Cutlass vehicles to replace defective windshield wiper pivot housings. GM reported the wiper failure was triggered by loads placed on the wipers when operated under conditions of moderate to heavy snowfall. GM conducted the recall in 28 states and the District of Columbia (recall states) that receive moderate to heavy snowfall. The recall covered the subject vehicles built through January 1998. ODI opened this RQ in response to complaints from consumers that experienced wiper failure and were denied the recall remedy.

GM is sending letters to owners not located in the recall states giving them a free remedy upon request if they anticipate driving the vehicle in areas that may have moderate to heavy snowfall. In addition, GM is notifying all owners who have changed their residence from a non-recall state to a recall state since the date of the original owner notification letter (March 2001).

The actions taken by the manufacturer are sufficient to resolve the issues raised by this investigation. The closing of this investigation does not constitute a finding by NHTSA that no safety-related defect exists. The agency reserves the right to take future action if warranted by the circumstances.

See attached summary.

*TZC  
1-25-05*

**SUMMARY REPORT**

The subject vehicles for this investigation are the Model Year (MY) 1997 and 1998 Malibu and Cutlass vehicles built through January 1998. Some models built after January 1998 use a more robust design for the passenger side wiper pivot housing (housing) and have not been shown to present the subject defect. GM used the post-January 1998 design housing as the recall remedy for the defective vehicles.

The complaints report failure of the windshield wipers. GM reports that turning on the wipers with the wiper's movement blocked by heavy snow or held in place by ice can cause overload of the passenger side wiper pivot housing. The housing suffers overload fracture that causes gross misalignment of the linkage and prevents any further proper operation of both the driver and passenger side wipers. GM's warranty data indicates that the failure is more common in regions that receive heavy snowfall and that failure rates declined significantly after a design change was put into production beginning with vehicles produced after January 1998. Based on this trend, GM conducted a regional recall for vehicles residing in 28 states and the District of Columbia.

ODI opened this investigation in response to complaints from consumers experiencing a wiper failure and were denied the recall remedy by a GM dealer. In some instances, the remedy was denied based on the complaint vehicle residing in a non-recall state. In other instances, the vehicle was in a recall state but the GM dealer's information failed to indicate that the vehicle (identified by the VIN) was subject to a recall (i.e GM's data indicated that the vehicle was not registered in a recall state). Most recent complaints fell into the former category. In short, the vast majority of complaints involved owner's not being availed the recall remedy even after their vehicle experienced a wiper failure identified by the recall.

To remedy this, GM has informed the agency that it will send letters to owners in non-recall states giving them the opportunity to have the free recall remedy upon request (based on the expectation of traveling in an area where heavy snow and ice may occur). Also, GM will send letters to owners that have moved their vehicle into a recall state since the original mailing of the recall notification letter sent in March 2001. And finally, GM is mailing letters to some owners located in the District of Columbia that GM inadvertently missed during its original mailing in March of 2001. GM will also reimburse owners who had to pay for passenger side wiper pivot housing failure following exposure to heavy snow and ice conditions. GM's actions are sufficient to resolve the issues identified under this investigation.