

## Howell, Rosa (NHTSA)

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**From:** Clarence Ditlow [cmdiii@autosafety.org]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 24, 2010 4:36 PM  
**To:** Hershman, Larry (NHTSA)  
**Subject:** FW: update  
**Attachments:** NY Times Grand Cherokee Petition Granted.doc

Public Affairs confirmed the difference was due to occupants in bullet vehicles not being counted.

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**From:** Christopher Jensen [<mailto:chris416jensen@aol.com>]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 24, 2010 4:19 PM  
**To:** Clarence Ditlow  
**Subject:** update

<http://wheels.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/grand-choerokee-is-investigated-for-gas-tank-danger/?ref=business>

added the one graph of your explanation.

nhtsa says that does, indeed, explain the difference.

best,  
chris



August 24, 2010, 10:19 am

## Grand Cherokee Is Investigated for Gas Tank Danger



The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is opening an investigation into 1993-2004 Grand Cherokees for dangerous gas tank placement. Above, a 1996 Jeep Grand Cherokee.

By [CHRISTOPHER JENSEN](#)

The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) said on Tuesday it would grant a consumer group's request to investigate if an estimated three million Jeep Grand Cherokees had gas tanks that were too vulnerable to fires after a rear impact.

The [petition to investigate the 1993-2004 Jeeps](#) was made last October by the [Center for Auto Safety](#), which claims the gas-tank design is defective.

In an e-mail, Michael Palese, a [Chrysler](#) spokesman, said, "Chrysler Group L.L.C. is cooperating fully with N.H.T.S.A. regarding an investigation into 1993-2004 model year Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles. It is important to note that this is an investigation, not a recall. The 1993-2004 Jeep Grand Cherokee meets or exceeds all applicable federal safety and has an excellent safety record."

The agency's investigation could lead to an expensive recall or it could decide there was no problem.

The [petition claims](#) that an analysis of crash deaths by the safety center and work done by the [Motor Vehicle Fire Research Institute](#) of Charlottesville, Va., clearly show the danger of the gas tank being mounted behind the rear axle.

The nonprofit institute said a bolt for the rear-stabilizer bar was a little more than an inch away from the plastic gas tank. That makes the tank vulnerable to a puncture in a rear-impact crash unless the vehicle has the optional rear skid plate, the institute concluded. In the redesigned 2005 Grand Cherokee, the fuel tank was moved ahead of the rear axle.

In addition, the petition said, research by the institute has found that the plastic fuel tank "degrades in performance over time" and has a "fuel filler neck that tears off in a range of crashes." According to the petition, there have been at least 44 crashes resulting in 64 deaths. In those crashes a fire was listed as "the most harmful event."

N.H.T.S.A. said its review of agency records show 2,988 occupants of the 1993–2004 Grand Cherokees died in crashes. Of those, 55 died in 44 crashes, in which the investigators determined that fire was the "most harmful event." Furthermore, 10 of the 44 crashes (resulting in 13 deaths) involved the Jeep being hit from behind.

Mr. Ditlow said the difference in the number of deaths was that the safety agency did not count people in other vehicles who died in collisions with the Jeeps. That would include a crash in Long Island in which the driver of a vehicle striking a Jeep died. While the occupants of the Jeep were burned, neither died.

"The existence of these post-crash fires does not, by itself, establish a defect trend," the agency said in granting the request. It also noted that a "preliminary review" of other information submitted by automakers "did not find the subject vehicles to be over-represented for post-crash fires."

One of the crashes cited in the Center for Auto Safety petition happened in 1999 on Long Island when a 1997 Grand Cherokee was struck from behind by a Toyota MR2 sports car.

"I heard a screech of tires and saw the Jeep lurch forward. Almost instantly I saw a large fireball from the rear of the Jeep. Within 30 seconds the whole Jeep was on fire," a witness told police. "I saw a second car as well. I saw a woman run from the passenger side of the Jeep. She was on fire. I also saw a man who was on fire."

The driver of the Toyota died from burns and two people in the Jeep were badly burned.

Anyone can file a defect petition asking N.H.T.S.A. to investigate a safety problem. The agency then decides whether an investigation is warranted. However, if the agency decides not to go ahead, there is no way to appeal. That could change under the proposed

Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 2010, which is before Congress. One provision of that would allow a court appeal of any defect petition the safety agency turns down.