

Ford Motor Company

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OFFICE OF
DEFECTS INVESTIGATION

James P. Vordale, Director
Automotive Safety Office
Environmental & Safety Engineering

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April 5, 2004

Mr. Kenneth N. Weinstein
Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

Re: Ford Recall No. 04S13 – 2001 through 2002 and Certain 2003 Model Year Ford Escape Vehicles – 3.0L Engine Stalling Issue

Summary

Ford Action – Ford, at the request of the agency, is conducting a voluntary safety recall involving 2001 through 2002 and certain 2003 model year Ford Escape vehicles equipped with 3.0L V6 engines and built between January 31, 2000 and September 11, 2002 for reported engine stalling. The recall action will involve reprogramming the powertrain control module (PCM) to prevent an intermittent engine stall that may occur during vehicle deceleration at speeds below 40 MPH. Ford's investigation found that the vehicles remained controllable after such engine stalls and can readily be maneuvered off the roadway. Further, the vehicles typically restart immediately, and some owners reported restarting their vehicles without coming to a stop. While it may be argued that stalling under certain conditions may increase the risk to safety, the stalling characteristics in this population of vehicles do not pose an unreasonable risk of accident or injury. The reports in this investigation clearly bear this out. During the agency's 26-month investigation on vehicles that have on average approximately three years in service, and in spite of the relatively large number of incidents, Ford is aware of only two reports of vehicle-to-vehicle impacts at low speeds (one of which references unspecified medical expenses) and two other allegations of very minor injuries (one alleged muscle strain from loss of power assist steering and the other alleged injury was nonspecific). We also identified five other incidents in which the vehicles were alleged to have impacted other objects such as curbs and fences. The nature of the stalling condition in this population does not constitute a safety defect, and years of field experience confirm this conclusion.

Ford does not, by taking this action, admit that a safety defect exists in these vehicles, nor does Ford believe that engine stalling presents an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety. Ford believes the agency should update its earlier study of engine stalling as a sequel to the earlier "Analysis of Stalling Problems" prepared by The Transportation Systems Center (Report No.HE702/S7502).

- Number of Vehicles Involved – Approximately 321,903 Escape vehicles in the United States and Federal Territories.



- Affect on Vehicle Operation – An intermittent engine stall may occur, typically, during vehicle deceleration from speeds below 40 MPH. In the vast majority of these cases the customer was able to restart the vehicle immediately.
- Service Procedure – Owners will be instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the PCM reprogrammed with the appropriate calibration.

Attached is the detailed information required by the applicable portions of 49 CFR Part 573 – Defect and Non-Compliance Information Report.

Sincerely,

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James P. Vondale
Attachment

**49 CFR Part 573 – DEFECT INFORMATION REPORT
03S10 – CERTAIN 2001 MODEL YEAR FORD ESCAPE VEHICLES**

Pursuant to Part 573 of Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Defect and Noncompliance Reports, Ford Motor Company (Ford) submits the following information concerning a safety recall action that it is initiating voluntarily.

573.6 (c) (2) – Potentially Affected Vehicles

The vehicles potentially affected are 2001 through 2002 and certain 2003 model year Ford Escape vehicles equipped with 3.0L V6 engines and built between January 31, 2000 and September 11, 2002, inclusive, at the Kansas City Assembly Plant.

Because these vehicles are not produced in VIN order, information as to the applicability of this action to specific vehicles can best be obtained by either calling Ford's toll-free line (1-800-392-3673) or by contacting a local Ford dealer who can obtain specific information regarding the vehicles from the Ford On-line Automotive Service Information System (OASIS) database.

573.6 (c) (3) – Estimated Population of Vehicles Potentially Affected

Approximately 321,903 Ford Escape vehicles in the United States and Federal Territories.

573.6 (c) (4) – Estimated Percentage of Affected Vehicles with the Defect Condition

Unknown.

573.6 (c) (5) – Description of the Defect

During decelerations at vehicle speeds below 40 mph the 3.0L V6 engine may stall due to excessively rich fuel-air mixtures being sent to the engine. Vehicles remain controllable and can easily be maneuvered to the side of the roadway. In almost every case the engine can be restarted immediately.

There have been eight alleged minor accidents that may be attributed to this issue. Three of these incidents also make allegations of minor injuries.

573.6 (c) (6) – Chronology of Events

In the second quarter of 2001 Ford identified an increasing number of reports and warranty claims alleging engine stalling that involved 2001 model year Escape vehicles built with 3.0L V6 Duratec engines. In August 2001 Ford organized a task force to investigate the root causes for these alleged incidents. In December 2001 the agency opened a Preliminary Evaluation (PE) investigation (PE03-030) of 3.0L engine stalling in 2001 and 2002 model year Ford Escape vehicles. In January and September of 2002 Ford revised the powertrain calibration for new vehicle production to prevent engine stalling during closed throttle vehicle decelerations below 40 mph. In November 2002 all of these calibration changes were made available to the dealerships when the latest TSB (02-23-1) was issued. On December 12, 2002 the agency upgraded it's investigation and sent Ford an Engineering Analysis (EA) information request letter (EA02-027). On December 12, 2003 the agency requested updates for owner and field reports and warranty claims.

573.6 (c) (8) – Service Program

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Owners will be instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the PCM reprogrammed with the appropriate calibration.

There will be no charge to owners for this service. Mailing of owner notification letters will begin and be completed on April 21, 2004. Ford's general reimbursement plan for the cost of remedies paid for by vehicle owners prior to notification of a safety recall was provided to the agency on February 28, 2003.

573.6 (c) (9) – Press statement and Dealer/Owner Letters

Ford does not at this time plan to make a statement to the media concerning the subject matter of this action. A copy of the Notification letters to dealers and owners from Ford will be forwarded to the agency when available.

573.6 (c) (11) – Recall Number

Ford has assigned recall number 04S13 to this action.

573.13 (c) (2) – Ending Date for Reimbursement Eligibility

The ending date for reimbursement eligibility for cost of remedies paid for by vehicle owners per Ford's general reimbursement plan is May 1, 2004.