

Ford Motor Company

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DEFECT INVESTIGATION

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05V-515
(3 Pages)

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

Subject: Ford Recall No. 05S37 – Certain 2005 Model Year Ford Freestyle, Five Hundred, and Mercury Montego Vehicles

Summary

- Ford Action -- Ford is conducting a voluntary safety recall involving certain 2005 model year Ford Freestyle, Five Hundred, and Mercury Montego vehicles to replace the fuel tank straps.
- Number of Vehicles Involved – Approximately 123,206 vehicles in the United States and Federalized Territories.
- Effect on Vehicle Operation – One or both fuel tank straps may fracture at high mileage. If both fuel tank straps fracture, the fuel tank and heat shield may drop onto the exhaust system (front-wheel drive vehicles) or the driveshaft (all-wheel drive vehicles). If the vehicle is operated in this condition the fuel tank may leak. A fuel leak in the presence of an ignition source could result in a fire. There are no known reports or claims alleging that any fuel tank straps have fractured on vehicles in customer service.
- Service Procedure – Owners will be instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the fuel tank straps and required attaching hardware replaced.

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

Sincerely,



James P. Vondale

Attachment



49 CFR Part 573 -- DEFECT INFORMATION REPORT
05S37-- CERTAIN 2005 MODEL YEAR FORD FREESTYLE, FIVE HUNDRED, AND
MERCURY MONTEGO VEHICLES -- FUEL TANK STRAP REPLACEMENT.

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

573.6 (c) (2) -- Potentially Affected Vehicles

Vehicles potentially affected are 2005 model year Ford Freestyle, Five Hundred, and Mercury Montego vehicles built at the Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP) from January 3, 2005, through June 21, 2005.

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 123,206 vehicles in the United States and Federalized Territories.

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

Unknown.

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

The Tier 2 supplier of the fuel tank straps changed the steel used in the manufacturing of the straps without notification to Ford. This material had a lower carbon content than specified and accordingly did not have the required strength. As a result, over time the straps may fracture allowing the tank to drop. Ford is not aware of any reports or claims alleging that any fuel tank straps have fractured on vehicles in customer service and there are no reports of any related accidents, fires, or injuries.

573.6 (c) (6) -- Chronology of Events

On December 22, 2004, the supplier of the fuel tank straps changed steel suppliers and began producing straps with steel that did not meet specifications. The supplier did not notify Ford of this action as required. On January 3, 2005, fuel tank straps produced with steel from the new supplier were introduced into new vehicle production at the CAP. On June 14, 2005, Ford first became aware of this potential concern when the right-hand fuel tank strap fractured on a future model year Freestyle vehicle with 65% of the structural durability test completed. A laboratory analysis of the steel used in the fractured fuel tank strap determined that it was not the same as the steel used in previous development testing and approved for the 2005 model year production. On June 22, 2005, a Stop Ship was issued and all fuel tank straps were replaced with certified stock on all vehicles at the CAP. On June 28, 2005, the Critical Concern Review Group was notified of this concern. On July 18, 2005, a second fuel tank strap partially fractured at 78% of the structural durability test. Analysis of the second strap confirmed that it was also made with the same steel

573.6 (c) (6) -- Chronology of Events (cont'd)

used in the previously fractured strap. On August 4, 2005, two additional vehicles began structural durability testing to verify performance of the non-approved steel. Fractures of the fuel tank strap were observed on September 2, 2005 on one vehicle at 76% of the structural durability test and on September 13, 2005, on the second vehicle at 95% of the structural durability test. A review of the engineering data from structural durability testing determined that a fuel tank strap manufactured from the suspect material may fracture at higher mileages on vehicles operating in severe conditions.

573.6 (c) (8) -- Service Program

Owners will be instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the fuel tank straps and required attaching hardware replaced. There will be no charge to owners for this service. Owner notification letters will be mailed on December 1, 2005. Dealer notification letters will be mailed on November 9, 2005.

In accordance with Part 573.13 (d) (1), Ford is excluding reimbursement for costs incurred by owners for repair of this problem because Ford's original warranty program would provide for a free repair for this concern for customers.

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 05S37 to this action.