

NHTSA probes Toyota steering rod recall

by Nora Tooher

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Documents unearthed during discovery in a lawsuit over the death of a California teenager have helped spark a federal investigation into whether Toyota stalled a recall of almost 1 million pickup trucks and SUVs over defective steering rods.

Shortly after a [request from O'Reilly Collins Law Firm](#) in San Mateo, Calif., the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [opened an investigation](#) into whether, in 2005, Toyota Motor Corp. notified the agency of a steering relay rod safety defect within five business days of learning of the defect's existence, as is required by law.

Toyota had issued a recall for the same component in Japan a year earlier than in the United States, even though it knew steering rods were failing in its U.S. models, according to John Kristensen, an attorney at O'Reilly Collins.

Kristensen is representing the family of Michael Levi Stewart, who was 18 when he died in a car crash in Idaho in 2007. Three months after the accident, the Stewart family received a notice from Toyota about the recall of a defective steering relay rod in the 1991 pickup.

The wrongful death lawsuit, filed in Superior Court in Los Angeles, alleges that Toyota knew the vehicles were defective and failed to warn the public.

Toyota has said it is cooperating with the NHTSA investigation.

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