

# News and analysis

## Takata airbag crisis deepens as fears emerge over refits



### The news

Faulty Takata airbags, which have been linked to 18 deaths worldwide, are being replaced by new faulty airbags, according to a consumer watchdog.

Japanese car parts maker Takata is already facing billions of dollars in liabilities over the defective airbags following fatalities across the globe, the latest of which occurred in Australia in June.

Consumer group Choice conducted an investigation, based only on the Australian market, and said it found that Toyota, Mazda, Lexus, BMW and Subaru admitted replacing the faulty airbags with identical devices. Many other car makers had not yet responded to its questions, it added.

The danger lies in faulty airbag inflators, which expand with too much force and propel metal fragments out of the bag. More than 100 million vehicles with Takata airbags, including about 70 million in the US, have been recalled since the issue first emerged in 2007. In August, the Australian government issued a warning about the possible dangers of driving vehicles fitted with Takata airbags.



### The views

Richard Dasher, director of the US-Asia Management Center at Stanford University, says Takata — and possibly government regulators — underestimated the severity of the conditions in which airbags are used.

“When problems started to appear, the company tried to explain them away rather than immediately launching a major investigation of their technology, which would have probably stopped ongoing development as well as holding up delivery of existing product,” he told *QW*.

“With about 20 per cent of world airbag sales, Takata would be forcing the world’s biggest automakers to hold up their own production schedules. At this point, opinion was divided about the reasons for the product failures. Could they fix the current technology, or did they need a fundamentally different design?”

“The company became defensive about its technology rather than really considering the possibility that a fundamental new approach was required. This defensive culture got to the point that it prevented open communication.”



### The analysis

Kate Smith, an affiliate member of the CQI, Six Sigma Master Black Belt and managing director at Capella Associates, said: “It’s easy to make minor changes to processes as we work but if we don’t document them, we have no chance of being able to measure the effect and to correlate them with improvements or problems.

“When multiple changes occur and when supply chains are long and complex, the effects of those changes become even harder to isolate and assess.

“Quality professionals have a key role to play in ensuring all abnormalities are captured and analysed. We can help to create a culture where problems are treated as opportunities to improve, so that people are open and honest when things go wrong and action can be taken straight away.

“There’s strong empirical evidence linking the occurrence of major problems with the number of minor problems, so by dealing with minor problems openly, robustly and swiftly, we can reduce the risk of major problems occurring.”

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