

SUPPORTING STATEMENTS  
FOR  
CONSUMER COMPLAINT INFORMATION  
2127-0008

This supporting statement is for the collection of information associated with safety-related problems owners are encountering with their motor vehicles and items of motor vehicle equipment, which include tires, child safety seats, motorcycle helmets, etc.

**1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.**

Chapter 301 of Title 49 of the United States Code (U.S.C.), formerly the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, as amended, authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to issue Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) and require manufacturers to recall motor vehicles and items of motor vehicle equipment when it has been determined that such products contain safety-related defects or do not comply with a safety standard. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) solicits information from vehicle owners, which is used to identify and evaluate possible safety-related defects and recall inadequacies. Manufacturers often times initiate safety recalls voluntarily, while other recalls are either influenced by NHTSA investigations or ordered by NHTSA via a court ruling. Pursuant to Title 49 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 573 and 577, manufacturers are required to notify NHTSA, as well as motor vehicle and motor vehicle equipment owners, dealers, and distributors that a determination has been made to remedy a defect through the issuance of a safety recall. When that determination has been made, the manufacturer is required to remedy the safety defect at no charge to the owner. The law provides the manufacturer with three options for correcting the defect: 1) repair the product, 2) replace the product with an identical or similar product, or 3) refund the purchase price of the product in full, minus a reasonable allowance for depreciation. NHTSA is responsible for monitoring the manufacturer's corrective action for adequacy and for compliance with statutory requirements.

**2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Indicate actual use of information received from the current collection.**

Vehicle owners provide NHTSA with raw complaint data concerning problems they are encountering with motor vehicles and items of motor vehicle equipment through the submission of a Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ), which is a paper, postage-paid, self-addressed mailer. This mailer contains owner information, product information, failed component information, and incident information. Only 6% of the complaints are submitted in this manner. Additionally, the owner may submit the same information as identified above electronically via NHTSA's Internet Web site or by calling the U.S. Department of Transportation's Auto Safety Hotline (DOT Hotline). When a consumer submits their report via the DOT Hotline, a partially filled out VOQ is mailed to the consumer for verification of the information entered on the form, with the opportunity for that owner to provide additional information and copies of supporting

documentation, and completion of the form with the owner's signature. A cover letter of explanation is also mailed with the VOQ, which helps to facilitate and simplify the information collection process of the report. The VOQ may also take the form of a consumer letter; however, written letters (approximately 1% of the total complaints submitted) often do not provide complete data on specific problems encountered with motor vehicles or items of motor vehicle equipment. If incomplete information is received by the agency, a VOQ is mailed to the owner with a request for additional information to be provided.

NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) receives incoming VOQs and enters the information being collected into its computerized database system, which is continually reviewed and evaluated by agency personnel, such as investigators, engineers, and analysts. As necessary, these reports are shared with other Government agencies.

The information being collected through the use of VOQs is essential to supporting DOT's safety-related strategic goals in working towards the elimination of transportation-related deaths and injuries. This collection of information assists in the initiation of safety defect and recall inadequacy investigations, which leads to determinations as to whether manufacturers will be required to remedy such defects and noncompliance through the issuance or expansion of safety recalls.

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.**

The DOT Hotline receives telephone calls from owners of motor vehicles and items of motor vehicle equipment reporting problems they have encountered. The DOT Hotline representatives enter the reported problems directly into ODI's complaints database for immediate review and evaluation by NHTSA personnel. After the DOT Hotline representative enters the owner's report into ODI's complaint database, a partially filled out VOQ is mailed to the consumer for verification of the information entered on the form, the opportunity for that owner to provide additional information and copies of supporting documentation, and completion of the form with the owner's signature. This process reduces the burden imposed on owners. Approximately 33% of the complaints are submitted this way.

Owners of motor vehicles and items of motor vehicle equipment are able to submit electronic reports concerning problems encountered through NHTSA's Internet Web site. Owners who report their problem via NHTSA's Internet Web site receive electronic confirmation that their reports have been entered directly into ODI's complaints database. This process further minimizes the burden imposed on owners, thereby receiving almost 100% of the requested information. About 60% of consumer complaints are collected through this electronic means.

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.**

Generally, owners of motor vehicles and items of motor vehicle equipment report the problems they encounter to the agency only once for a specific defect. Yet, some owners submit multiple reports to the agency when the problem they encounter is intermittent or frequent in occurrence. Each report is electronically assigned a unique reference number in ODI's complaints database. However, duplicate reports are easily identifiable when complaint data is reviewed and evaluated. There is no other source from which this information is obtainable.

**5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize the burden.**

The information collection generally does not affect small businesses and other small entities.

**6. Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

If the information collection were to be conducted less frequently, NHTSA would not be capable of identifying potential safety-related defects, and recall inadequacies. If safety-related problems are not readily identifiable, the number of crashes, fires, injuries, and fatalities that occur on our Nation's highways could potentially increase. Further, the agency would be severely limited in its ability to develop technical foundations of evidence with which to prove to manufacturers and the court that safety-related defects exist.

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with the guidelines set forth in 5 CFR 1320.6.**

There are no special circumstances requiring consumer complaint information to be reported in any manner requiring explanation under this Item.

**8. Provide a copy of the Federal Register document soliciting comments on extending the collection of information, a summary of all public comments responding to the notice, and a description of the agency actions in response to the comments. Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views.**

A copy of the Federal Register Notice (January 22, 2008, Volume 73, Number 14, Pages 3800 and 3801) soliciting comments on extending the collection of information is attached. NHTSA received no public comments in response to that notice.

**9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

No gift or payment will be provided to any respondent.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.**

A statement authorizing the agency to provide the consumer complaint information to the manufacturer is included on the form. If written authorization is not provided, the personal identification information is not provided to the manufacturer.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions on matters that are commonly considered private.**

No questions of a sensitive nature are involved in the collection of information.

**12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information on the respondents.**

Respondents have averaged 34,627 consumer complaints to NHTSA between January 2004 and December 2007. NHTSA anticipates that a respondent can complete a VOQ in approximately 0.25 hours (15 minutes). The consumer is to provide his/her name, complete mailing address, product information, failed component information, and incident information, copies of supporting documentation, and his/her signature. Under these circumstances, respondents assume an annual burden of 8,657 hours (34,627 respondents X 0.25 hours per VOQ = 8,657 annual hourly burden). Cost associated with annual burden hours assumed by respondents is estimated at \$121,198.00 for a clerical person paid \$14.00 per hour to process the forms (8,657 hours X \$14.00 per hour = \$121,198.00 annual cost burden).

**13. Provide an estimate for the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).**

(a) NHTSA reasons that there is no start-up cost component associated with the collection of consumer complaint information, as this is not a new collection.

(b) Any operation and maintenance costs attributed to this collection are minimal because VOQs are stored in a data warehouse that is also used to store a voluminous amount of other information, i.e., industry recalls, investigation files, service manuals, owner's manuals, etc. The operation and maintenance costs for this system, which are attributable to VOQs is negligible.

**14. Provide estimates of annualized costs to the Federal government.**

Respondents submitted an average of 11,427 reports through the DOT Hotline between January 2004 and December 2007. The estimated cost to the Federal government to generate VOQs, generate cover letters, purchase envelopes, and purchase postage to and from the agency is approximately \$358,784.40 ((Printing 11,427 forms at \$0.10 per form = \$1,142.70) + (Printing 11,427 cover letters at \$0.08 per letter = \$914.16) + (Purchasing 11,427 envelopes at \$0.10 per envelope = \$1,142.70) + (Mailing 11,427 forms x \$0.46 per form for postage and surcharge, plus return postage = \$10,512.84) + (contractor cost \$345,072) = \$358,784.40)).

**15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-I.**

The hour burden decreased because the number of respondents submitting consumer complaints decreased.

**16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication.**

The collection of this information will not have results published for statistical use.

**17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.**

The agency does not seek approval to remove the expiration date of OMB approval.

**18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19, "Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions," of OMB Form 83-I.**

No exceptions to the certification statement are made.

**B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

No such methods are used.