



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Pipeline and Hazardous
Materials Safety
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Safety Advisory Notice 2024-16

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Office of Hazardous Materials Safety

Why PHMSA Wrote this Safety Advisory Notice

PHMSA is issuing this safety advisory notice to inform the public, repair professionals, and used car buyers and owners of the increased circulation of counterfeit and substandard safety devices—e.g., air bag inflators, air bag modules, seatbelt pretensioners, pyromechanical devices, and other supplemental restraint system (SRS) components. The suspected replacement safety devices may be produced by companies with limited manufacturing experience and are sometimes sold at prices significantly lower than those of genuine, high-quality replacement devices, which are ordered online and shipped into or through the United States. These counterfeit parts may contain unapproved explosive devices and construction material and may pose additional transportation risks when compared to equipment manufactured through legitimate means to meet original equipment manufacturer (OEM) specifications. These counterfeit and substandard safety devices should not be purchased or installed in any automobiles manufactured or repaired in the United States—these counterfeit safety devices can cause serious injury or even death in a crash.

Supplementary Information

Safety devices are articles which contain pyrotechnic substances or hazardous materials of other classes and are used in vehicles, vessels, or aircraft to enhance safety to persons.

Requirements for testing, packaging, shipping, and transporting safety devices are prescribed in the Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMR; 49 CFR parts 171-180). Safety devices which do not contain flammable or toxic gases (or mixtures thereof) may be classed as Class 9 and must have each design type examined and successfully tested by a person or agency who is authorized by the Associate Administrator. Each device should be properly packaged, shipped, and labeled with the appropriate hazard class as required by the HMR.

The requirements contained in the HMR provide for the safe transportation of properly manufactured and approved safety devices. However, counterfeit safety devices, including airbags and other substandard replacement parts, are a growing concern. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), along with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), have seized more than 211,000 counterfeit automotive parts in fiscal year 2024—almost doubling the number of counterfeit automotive parts seized the previous fiscal year.¹ Of those, CBP has seized more than 490 counterfeit airbags—more than 10 times the number of counterfeit airbags seized in fiscal year 2023. HSI also has approximately 40 open investigations into counterfeit automotive parts.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) states that counterfeit air bags have been shown to “consistently malfunction,” from non-deployment to the expulsion of plastic and metal shrapnel during deployment, resulting in at least three fatalities.² The vehicles involved in the crashes had replacement airbags installed by independent repair shops after previous accidents, during which the original manufacturer-installed airbags deployed as intended.

¹ <https://www.dhs.gov/hsi/news/2024/09/23/automotive-safety-awareness-campaign-warns-consumers-about-counterfeit-airbags>

² <https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/used-car-owners-buyers-dangerous-replacement-air-bag-inflators>

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PHMSA recommends that consumers obtain a vehicle history report before purchasing a used vehicle, and also for vehicles already purchased if the history is unknown. Additionally, for used vehicles with a history of an air bag deployment, PHMSA recommends visiting a reputable mechanic or dealership for an airbag inspection to ensure the parts meet OEM specifications.

When repairing or replacing safety devices in vehicles, consumers should request proof from the repair facility that the parts used are certified parts meeting OEM specifications. Moreover, PHMSA recommends consumers exercise caution when shopping online for all automotive safety devices identified in this advisory and consider the brand and source of the parts prior to purchase. If consumers suspect they may have a faulty, substandard replacement part, they should consult a dealership or a reputable mechanic to determine if these parts need to be replaced.

Issued in Washington, D.C., on January 16, 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William S. Schoonover". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

William S. Schoonover,
Associate Administrator, Office of Hazardous Materials Safety
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.