

Status Report

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General Motors Plans Securiflex Windshield Test in Rental Fleets

Federal safety officials have granted General Motors permission to equip 2,500 automobiles for rental fleets with anti-lacerative windshields to test their durability in use.

The auto maker has shipped regular laminated production windshields to Saint-Gobain Vitrage in Europe in order that the Securiflex "inner guard," a film of clear plastic, be applied and the windshields returned for installation in General Motors cars. The "inner guard" is expected to reduce painful and disfiguring lacerations in crashes.

Since 1968 a federal standard (FMVSS 205) has required that vehicles manufactured for use in the United States have windshields of glass laminated around a layer of plastic to provide penetration resistance. The standard also established an abrasion test for the glass, principally to ensure that road grit and windshield wipers do not lead to deterioration in visibility. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) officials have interpreted the standard to mean both the exterior and interior surfaces must pass the abrasion test. As a result, the Securiflex process has been blocked from U.S. use for years because the inner surface which self-heals minor scratches, does not meet the agency's abrasion requirements.

More than 2 1/2 years ago, the Securiflex makers petitioned for a change in the windshield standard so that their product, which has had much use in Europe, could be accepted for U.S. vehicles. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 13, Aug. 14, 1980.) Early in 1981, NHTSA issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking on the matter. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety endorsed the Securiflex petition and later that year urged NHTSA to eliminate the abrasion test for inner surfaces immediately. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 6, April 27, 1981.) NHTSA refused the petition.

General Motors told NHTSA it is interested in evaluating "the efficacy and practicality" of the European type windshield. "We seek actual production and field experience under a wide variety of North American conditions," the company told Raymond Peck, NHTSA administrator. "Such an appraisal can help determine whether any haze caused by the surface abrasion that occurs in normal use is a safety concern, and whether production difficulties exist."

Because of concerns over exemptions granted under the Safety Act, General Motors emphasized it was not asking an exemption but, instead, "seeks the administrator's assistance in suggesting the most appropriate action that will permit a timely implementation of the field evaluation described above."

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NHTSA Proposes Utility Vehicle Warning Sticker

All utility vehicles would have to carry a warning sticker cautioning operators that they handle differently than passenger cars, under a rule proposed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

At present only the AMC CJ Jeeps are required to carry such a warning, and that was the result of a consent order signed by the Jeep makers and the Federal Trade Commission. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 19, Dec. 9, 1981.)

The NHTSA requirement would apply equally to all multipurpose passenger vehicles which have special features for off-road operation. NHTSA mentioned as examples of this class of vehicle the AMC Jeeps, Chevrolet Blazer, Ford Bronco, Plymouth Trail Duster, Dodge Ram Charger, VW Thing, Toyota Land Cruiser, and the GMC Jimmy.

Warning stickers would carry this or a similar message under the proposed rule: "This is a multipurpose vehicle."
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Defect Study Rejected

In proposing rulemaking to require warning stickers on all utility vehicles, NHTSA reported that it had recently rejected a petition to open a defect investigation into the performance of the Jeep CJ-5.

"The agency was unable to find that design characteristic[s] of the subject vehicle alone warrant, based on evidence before the agency, opening of such a proceeding," NHTSA said in its *Federal Register* notice.

In a letter to a Massachusetts attorney rejecting the defect investigation, NHTSA blamed the overwhelming majority of Jeep crashes on factors such as speeding, reckless driving, and alcohol and said, "the Jeep CJ-5 appears to be less forgiving of incautious driving or unfavorable operating conditions than may be other vehicles."

NHTSA explained that it considered a recent decision of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in a study of complaints about the CJ-5 Jeeps. In that case the FTC and the Jeep Corporation signed a consent order requiring the vehicle maker to "cease and desist" from alleged deceptive advertising practices and to issue warning stickers with new Jeep CJ vehicles warning users that the Jeeps handle differently from passenger cars. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 19, Dec. 9, 1981.)

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pose passenger vehicle which will handle and maneuver differently from an ordinary passenger car in driving conditions which may occur on streets and highways and off the road. As with other vehicles of this type, if you make sharp turns or abrupt maneuvers, especially at high speeds, you may lose control and crash. You should read driving guidelines and instructions in the Owner's Manual, and WEAR YOUR SEATBELTS AT ALL TIMES."

Similar warnings are proposed to be included in the owner's manual, emphasizing: "If at all possible, avoid sharp turning maneuvers. As with other vehicles of this type, failure to operate this vehicle correctly may result in loss of control or an accident."

In a *Federal Register* notice of the proposed rulemaking December 30, NHTSA blamed problems

with the utility vehicles on their operators' lack of understanding of their handling characteristics, particularly on paved roads. The agency acknowledged that research indicates that "utility vehicles are disproportionately more highly represented in rollover accidents than are passenger cars."

NHTSA singled out one study for comment in the notice, research sponsored by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and conducted by the Highway Safety Research Institute of the University of Michigan. That study reported that utility vehicles roll over at a rate "at least five times higher than that experienced by the average passenger car," the agency said. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 15, No. 7, May 6, 1980.) The same research indicated that utility vehicle occupants are more likely to be killed in a rollover crash than are occupants of passenger cars.

The warning stickers proposed by NHTSA would be required by amendments to the agency's Consumer Information Regulations. NHTSA has called for public comment on the proposal by February 14. Comments should be addressed to Docket No. 32-20; Notice 1, Docket Section, Room 5109, Nassif Building, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

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"Under this limited and special circumstance," Peck responded, "the agency can firmly state that it would not enforce the abrasion requirement as it now stands since it appears not to be appropriate for technology like the Securiflex windshield. That technology has been developed since the standard was originally issued. Equally important, the agency notes that current research data indicate that Securiflex windshields do indeed have great potential for reducing lacerative injuries in accidents."

Peck added that NHTSA intends to proceed with rulemaking "in the near future" to make changes in FMVSS 205 that are appropriate to allow new glazing materials such as Securiflex.

General Motors had stated in its application to NHTSA that the issue of abrasion resistance was primarily a matter of commercial acceptability to the company. "Accordingly, we don't believe the agency should feel constrained to delay rulemaking or reconsideration of its interpretation pending the outcome of GM's field evaluation," the auto maker told NHTSA.