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Gregory Bull / Associated Press

Elements of a fire suppression system sit within a Ford Crown Vic frame. Police groups have been concerned over fire deaths following rear-end collisions.

Cops: Ford fix not enough

Automaker's offer of fire suppression equipment not likely to stem police cruiser controversy

By Jeff Plungis / Detroit News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Ford Motor Co.'s latest attempt to offer a fix for the Crown Victoria police cruiser drew mixed reviews from police groups, indicating controversy over the vehicle's safety is likely to continue.

At a New York City news conference Thursday, Ford said it would begin offering an optional fire-suppression system with 2005 models of the Crown Victoria Police Interceptor.

"This is a good start by Ford to recognize there is a problem," said Chuck Canterbury, national president of the Fraternal Order of Police. "Now they need to solve the problem. They ought to be socially responsible and fix the thousands of cars on the road today."

On Monday, the Grand Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police passed a resolution calling for all law enforcement agencies to halt Crown Vic purchases until Ford offers a new fix.

Police groups and attorneys general around the country have been concerned about the Crown Vic over a rash of fire deaths following rear-end collisions. At least 13 officers have died since 1992.

Critics say the placement of the Crown Vic's fuel tank, behind the rear axle, leaves it especially vulnerable to rupture in a high-speed collision. Last year, Ford offered to place plastic shields around the fuel tank at

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locations it was most likely to rupture.

The bipartisan National Association of Attorneys General formed a task force to study Crown Vic safety in June. In May, the city of Dallas issued a moratorium on future Crown Victoria purchases until Ford offers a fix.

Dallas city attorney Madeleine Johnson said Ford should make the fire-suppression system standard equipment.

Ford has not found a fire-suppression technology reliable enough to offer as a fix for existing cars. The company continues to stand by the safety of the Crown Vic.

"Until we, as a society, eliminate high-speed accidents, we will never eliminate fire," said Sue Cischke, Ford vice president of environmental and safety engineering. "The potential of a fuel leak, while rare, is part of the risk of every high-speed accident."

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