

Senator Calls For Retrofits On Ford Police Cruisers

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ALBANY, N.Y. -- U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer urged the Ford Motor Co. Tuesday to retrofit Crown Victoria police cruisers with a fire suppression system Ford will offer as an option on 2005 models.

"It's great that Ford has come up with this new system for its 2005 models, but what about the 350,000 police cars that are already on the road?" Schumer said.

In announcing the new technology last week, Ford said police cars on the road now cannot be retrofitted because the system uses advanced electronics and onboard sensors that must be integrated into a new computer system.

Schumer said Ford should be able to overcome those hurdles.

"Although installing the new fire safety system in these vehicles may create logistical and structural challenges, I am confident that Ford's world-class engineers will be able to resolve such problems," the New York Democrat said in a letter to CEO William Clay Ford Jr.

Police unions and others say the Crown Victoria model made for patrol duty, the Police Interceptor (CVPI), bursts into flames when hit from behind at high speeds. Schumer said at least 45 police officers have been killed or burned in fires following rear-end collisions with CVPIs.

Ford said the great speeds involved in the accidents caused the fires and that no model can be fireproofed under those circumstances.

However, Ford announced last Thursday that it will offer a fire suppression system on Police Interceptors starting with the 2005 model. The system will release chemicals to douse fires in the vehicle's fuel system following a severe accident, giving officers time to get out of their vehicles.

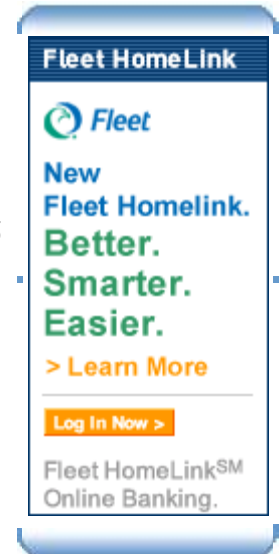
Schumer said Ford's announcement last week was an acknowledgment that safety weaknesses exist in the Police Interceptor.

"You have shown that you will provide the highest safety standards possible in the 2005 cruiser and I strongly encourage you to do the same with all other CVPIs in use," Schumer told Ford.

Ford spokeswoman Kristen Kinley said the company has developed the suppression system, the fuel tank shield and a trunk pack to prevent objects in the back of police cruisers like flares from being shot into the fuel tank during a rear-end accident.

"We have already advanced the safety of the Crown Victoria Police Interceptor well beyond governmental regulations or industry practice," she said Tuesday. "However, until we as a society eliminate high-speed accidents, we will never eliminate the risk of fire."

Schumer also called for protective bladders, similar to those used in some race cars, to be put into Police Interceptor



fuel tanks to prevent punctures. Kinley said Ford has found the bladders do not hold up over the high miles and heavy duty driving experienced by Police Interceptors.

About 1,100 CVPIs are in use by New York State Police. The models were fitted with a plastic shield that added protections to the fuel tank starting late last year. Trooper Robert Ambrose was killed last December when his CVPI, without the tank shield, was smashed into by a drunken driver on the New York State Thruway in Yonkers.

Daniel De Federicis, president of the state trooper Police Benevolent Association, said hundreds of his members are driving what he termed "ticking time bombs."

"It is insulting to troopers for Ford to announce grand plans that won't be implemented until two years from now," De Federicis said Tuesday. "These plans would be acceptable if they were coupled with immediate solutions that were implemented today and actually work."

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