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Grieving Relatives Implore Ford to Recall Cruiser

Fire Experts Show Technology Holds In 82 mph Impact

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A lucky survivor and families of the two latest police officers to die in Ford Crown Victoria police cruiser fuel tank explosions joined today with fire safety experts to release dramatic new evidence that the cars can be protected from fires in rear-end crashes of up to 82 miles per hour. The independent crash test using a fuel tank bladder and a fire extinguishing panel – technology originating with race cars and military aircraft – came less than a month after Ford announced that its own task force was stalled in efforts to make the car safer.

"This and other technology has been available to Ford for years. Since May, fuel-fed fire deaths or injuries to police officers have occurred at the rate of one per month. This must stop. We are here today to demand that Ford recall the Crown Victoria police cruiser and begin installing available technology for the protection of law officers," said David Perry, a Corpus Christi, Texas, attorney who represents police officers' families.

"I implore Ford to act, and act now, before another officer is killed," said Ann Marie Nielsen, widow of Chandler, Arizona, Police Officer Robert Nielsen. Nielsen burned to death June 12 after his Ford police cruiser burst into flames following a rear-end collision. The Reverend and Mrs. Robert Davis, whose son, Jeff Davis, a Lake City, Florida, police officer died May 30, added, "We must move forward with a solution."

"It's up to Ford to prevent the next tragedy. No more excuses," said Pat McGroder, a Phoenix, Arizona, attorney, who has represented numerous police officers and their families.

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Police Interceptors**

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At least 12 police officers have died and 9 have been injured seriously in fuel-fed Ford police car post-collision fires. At issue is the car's fuel tank, which is located behind the rear axle and within the vehicle's designated "crash zone." High speed rear-end crashes push the fuel tank against portions of the rear axle or suspension system with enough force to rupture the tank, spill fuel and ignite the vehicle.

Sgt. Gregg Abbott, of Cobb County, Georgia, narrowly escaped death July 4, when his Ford police car was rear-ended by a truck at highway speed, rupturing the fuel tank and causing it to burst into flames. The cruiser's doors jammed, which nearly always occurs in high-speed rear impacts, and Abbott escaped through the passenger window.

"I was one of the few lucky officers in these types of crashes who have lived to tell their stories," Abbott said. "I'm here today to say to Ford Motor Company: Recall these police cars."

In a separate incident, New York State Trooper George Rought escaped serious injury when he was dragged out of his burning Ford police cruiser after the patrol vehicle was rear-ended and burst into flames on August 5.

An Arizona fire safety company said that its fire-extinguishing panel, used in combination with a Fuel Safe prototype fuel tank bladder, withstood a direct rear-on impact of 81.9 miles per hour in a test using a 1999 Crown Victoria and a Ford pick-up truck. In order to simulate a real world crash, gasoline was used in the Crown Victoria, instead of a non-flammable substitute normally used in such tests by the auto industry, according to Bill Eckholm, President of FIRE Panel LLC, of Scottsdale, Arizona.

"The military uses this type of fire panel to protect its aircraft from bursting into flames after direct hits to their fuel tanks. It's been around for some time and is available to Ford today to save lives," Eckholm said.

The Technologies and the Test

The independent crash test was performed by Goodrich Aerospace at its Hurricane Mesa Test Track, a military testing center in Hurricane, Utah.

The first component, the Fuel Safe bladder, lines the fuel tank and enhances its structural integrity, limiting the possibility of fuel spraying if the tank is damaged. The second component, the FIRE Panel, creates a plume of fire retardant powder around the tank on impact to "inert" the environment and prevent any fuel that does leak from igniting. The FIRE Panel has its origins in advanced military technology that is used to protect the fuel tanks on sophisticated helicopters and aircraft.

Using a pusher/rocket sled, engineers crashed a 1970 Ford F-100 pick-up truck weighing more than 4,000 pounds into the rear of a 1999 Ford CVPI equipped with both the Fuel Safe bladder and the FIRE Panel. The pick-up impacted the rear of the CVPI at 81.9 miles per hour, a speed typical of the impact speeds in several of the CVPI crashes. The entire crash sequence was filmed by a series of cameras to create a detailed record of the event. The impact caused extreme damage to the rear of the CVPI, but no fire.

Lake City, FL Police Officer Jeff Davis died May 30 – the day of his 24th birthday – a day after his Ford cruiser swerved to avoid pedestrians and struck a tree, pinning him into the vehicle as it exploded and burned. He was the third Florida officer to die since 1997.

Officer Nielsen's death on June 12 – the third such death in Arizona – prompted Arizona officials and national consumer groups to urge a recall of the Crown Victoria police car. Ford announced in late June that it was appointing task forces to review

the safety of the vehicle.

On August 8, a Ford executive said that the technical task force had stopped work because it could not obtain enough Fuel Safe bladders to conduct tests. The reason cited was that all the bladders currently are under contract to the City of Phoenix. However, in letters to Ford dated March 7 and June 26, Fuel Safe repeats an offer to participate with Ford in a joint testing program.

Historically, Fuel Safe has supplied bladders to Ford for its racing program and fuel tanks for Ford's production Mustang Cobra R.

"Ford is no stranger to bladder technology and has used it successfully in the past," McGroder noted. "Fuel Safe is willing to participate in any kind of a joint program with Ford to solve this problem," he added.

In June 2001, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicated plans to investigate the fuel-fed fatalities, but after a visit with Ford executives in July, NHTSA did not initiate the study. The agency finally began an investigation in November after receiving information from attorney David Perry of still more law enforcement deaths and a copy of an internal Ford memo documenting the July meeting with NHTSA. NHTSA has not released the results of its investigation.

Meanwhile, class action lawsuits have been filed against Ford in Texas, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida and Ohio.

In May 2001, Ford settled lawsuits stemming from police car fuel-fed fires with the families of deceased officers Juan Cruz, of Tucson, Arizona, Floyd James "Skip" Fink Jr., of Tempe, Arizona, and Steve Agner, of Madison Florida. The families were represented by David Perry, of Perry & Haas, L.L.P., Corpus Christi, Texas, and Patrick McGroder III, of Gallagher and Kennedy, P.A., Phoenix, Arizona.

Perry and McGroder also represent Arizona Police Officer Jason Schechterle, who was severely burned in a fuel-fed fire on March 26, 2001, and the families of officers Nielsen and Davis. They are co-counsel to Sgt. Greg Abbott, with attorney Joseph Fried, of Henry, Spiegel, Fried & Milling, L.L.P., Atlanta, GA.

For more information log on to <http://www.safetyforum.com/cvpi>

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**[Click here for Timeline of Ford Crown Victoria
Police Interceptor Post-Collision Fires \(MS Word\)](#)**

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