

Transport Committee

House of Commons 2nd Floor 14 Tothill Street London SW1H 9NB

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Paul Satoor
Interim Chief Executive
Chief Executive's Office
DVSA
The Axis Building
112 Upper Parliament Street
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7 December 2015

Dear Paul,

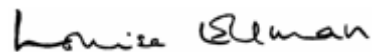
I have received a number of representations from the public and Members of Parliament on the recent incidents of Vauxhall Zafira B models catching fire. There are widespread concerns that both Vauxhall and the DVSA should have acted faster to minimise risk and alleviate anxiety amongst motorists.

I understand that Vauxhall are attributing the fires to improper repairs of the heating and ventilation system. Vauxhall is writing to affected Zafira owners offering an inspection of their vehicle and to replace components if necessary. I would be grateful for a briefing outlining the known facts of this case and the work that the DVSA has carried out in response. It should include answers to the following questions.

- 1. What discussions has the DVSA had with Vauxhall about the incidents of car fires from Vauxhall Zafira B models?**
 - b. When did these discussions take place?**
- 2. Is the DVSA satisfied with Vauxhall's explanation of what caused the fires?**
 - b. If so, on what evidence is that based?**
- 3. Is the DVSA conducting any independent testing to identify the cause of the fires?**
- 4. How is the DVSA monitoring affected vehicles that have been 'fixed' to ensure that Vauxhall's solution works?**

5. **What actions has the DVSA taken to address concern amongst owners about the risk of Vauxhall cars catching fire?**
6. **Under what circumstances would you issue a formal recall of vehicles when there is a risk of fire? Why have you not done so in this case?**

Please could you provide me with this information by 21 December. It is my intention to publish your response on the Transport Select Committee's website.



Louise Ellman MP
Chair of the Transport Select Committee



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our ref: 1512/00898

21 December 2015

Dear Mrs Ellman

Thank you for your letter of 7 December about recent safety issues with certain models of Vauxhall Zafira catching fire.

Since the receipt of the first completed safety defect reported to us on 12 October, we have been in frequent communication with Vauxhall (part of General Motors Europe) and hereafter referred to as 'Vauxhall' about the investigation into the vehicle fires on models of its Zafira B car.

The vehicle recall process is a tried and tested procedure. Part of our role in the process is to monitor the progress of a safety recall. We do not inspect every vehicle affected by remedial action from a safety recall, because that is not our remit and we are therefore not resourced to do so. If we receive a report that there is a point(s) of failure with a safety recall we will open a new investigation into the reported failure. This is extremely rare because the manufacturer/importer will usually ensure that the required work conducted as part of a safety recall is tested rigorously to ensure that vehicles are safe.

We are not conducting any independent testing into the cause of the vehicle fires on the affected Zafira models because it is the responsibility of the vehicle manufacturer/importer to conduct the investigation into the cause of any alleged safety issues on its products and present its findings to us. Should we disagree with the findings of the investigation, then we can require the manufacturer/importer to conduct further investigations and testing; alternatively, we can conduct independent testing under the General Product Safety Regulations if we deem it necessary to do so. This is set out in the terms of the code of practice on vehicle safety defects, a copy of which is attached for your attention

The code of practice defines a safety defect to be '*A safety related defect is a failure due to design and/or construction, which is likely to affect the safe operation of the product without prior warning to the user and may pose a significant risk to the driver, occupants and others.*' If the finding of an investigation into an alleged reported safety defect meets the above criteria and this defect will be common to a number of products that have been

sold for use in the UK, then we will require the manufacturer/importer of the vehicle/product to complete an action under the terms of a safety recall.

Currently, we are satisfied that the evidence that Vauxhall has presented is a reasonable explanation into the cause of the fires on Zafira B models. Vauxhall presented physical evidence about the manipulated heater motor resistors from both damaged vehicles and vehicles inspected as part of the action taken before a safety recall is announced, as well as statistical evidence and evidence from its testing of the heating and ventilation system. But should any further evidence become available to counter that evidence, we shall of course re-open the investigation.

We initially agreed with Vauxhall that action short of a safety recall should be taken, so that it could write to all owners of the cars asking them to return their cars to a Vauxhall dealer to have them inspected as part of the safety investigation. This was to ensure that the cars' heating and ventilation system was to the original production specification.

We did not request a safety recall until a full and proper investigation into the cause of the fires had been fully completed. To instigate a safety recall without understanding fully the cause of the safety defect, and without having an appropriate rectification process in place, could potentially place the public at a greater risk.

We attended a meeting with Vauxhall on 4 December, where findings from its investigation into the vehicle fires on the Zafira B models were presented. Following the meeting on 4 December, we asked Vauxhall to initiate a safety recall for the affected cars at risk and to inform their owners of the action being taken to remove the risk to them and to the public. Vauxhall announced its intention to do so on 14 December to address this issue, which is being conducted under the terms of the code of practice on vehicle safety defects.

Yours sincerely

Paul Satoor
Chief Executive (interim)