

Toyota recalls Prius models to update software

Recall includes 1.9 million vehicles globally, 713,000 in North America

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Toyota is recalling more than half of the Prius vehicles ever sold to fix a software glitch.

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TOKYO -- North American Toyota dealers will be asked to reprogram software in about 713,000 Toyota Prius cars that are being recalled to fix a hybrid control unit glitch that can cause the cars to automatically shut down and enter a limp-home failsafe mode.

Toyota Motor Corp. today announced the global recall of the third-generation hybrid vehicle, the flagship of the carmaker's gasoline-electric fleet.

The global callback extends to 1.9 million Prius models, making it the biggest recall of the world's best-selling hybrid. About 713,000 of those cars are in North America, and another 997,000 are in Japan. The recall affects 130,000 more cars in Europe.

The remainder is sprinkled across Oceania, the Middle East, China and other markets.

The software update should take about 40 minutes, Toyota spokeswoman Shino Yamada said. But if the update doesn't take, a control module would then need to be replaced, a fix taking about three hours. Dealers will be notified today, Toyota said.

The software problem causes a glitchy boost converter, which can lead to overheating that can, in turn, damage or deform transistors, Toyota said.

That can trigger warning lights or cause the car to enter a failsafe mode in which its engine power is reduced just enough to bring the car to the side of the road.

The problem was first reported in May 2011 in the United States. In that instance, a warning light went off and the car entered the failsafe mode.

No injuries or accidents have been reported because of the problem, Yamada said.

The affected cars were built between March 2009 and Feb. 5, 2014.

The campaign marks the third major recall for the third-generation Prius, which debuted in 2009. In February 2010, Toyota called back 397,000 vehicles worldwide to fix an anti-lock brake software glitch. That callback happened at the height of Toyota's unintended acceleration recall crisis. Last June, it recalled 87,000 third-generation Prius – all in North

America – to fix a brake pressure accumulator.

"My impression is Toyota is recalling more often, even with very minor flaws" with its vehicles, said Yuuki Sakurai, the Tokyo-based president of Fukoku Capital Management. "Toyota learned its lesson from the big recalls in 2009 and 2010."

Aside from the Prius, Toyota said it will recall about 260,000 other vehicles in the U.S. That campaign involves a separate issue with the 2012 and 2013 model years of the Toyota Tacoma pickup, the Lexus RX 350 sport utility vehicle and the 2012 Toyota RAV4 SUV.

A software issue with those models can cause their stability, anti-lock braking and traction controls to intermittently turn off, though the standard braking operation in those vehicles would remain fully functional, according to a statement on the company's U.S. website.

Bloomberg contributed to this report

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