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## News Release

GM EVADED QUESTIONS ABOUT IGNITION SWITCH SAFETY WHEN FACED WITH DEATH INQUIRIES

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***Documents reveal General Motors repeatedly avoided answering questions about its defective ignition switch when faced with ‘death inquiries’ from regulators investigating vehicle crashes***

MONTGOMERY, ALA. (July 17, 2014) – Today the head of General Motors (GM)’s legal department, Michael P. Millikin, along with GM CEO Mary Barra, testified before the Congressional Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Safety and Insurance in the ongoing evaluation of the company’s handling of a defective ignition switch problem and eventual recall. In its evaluation of its own performance, Barra said her company suffered from a “pattern of incompetence and neglect” but has steadily insisted there was no cover-up or conspiracy to conceal the problem. But an examination of so-called “death inquiries” by federal regulators following crashes involving GM vehicles, it is apparent multiple people at the company repeatedly avoided answering questions about the problem, even with internal knowledge of multiple deaths. Now independent safety experts believe the number is much higher. The possible concealment of critical safety information is at the center of a criminal investigation of GM being conducted by the U.S. Justice Department.

“After watching the presentations today, I am more convinced than ever that General Motors intentionally covered up a known defect that has killed and badly injured hundreds of innocent people,” said Jere L. Beasley, founding shareholder of Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles, P.C. “No reasonable person should believe that only a few engineers and lawyers were responsible for conduct that is as bad as I have seen during my 35 years of handling product liability litigation. If GM operated in the manner described before the Congressional committees, and as found by the so-called independent investigation paid for by GM, then the automaker needs to clean house and bring in new blood – men and women who will do more than talk about bringing about a new safety culture, and truly make safety a reality at the company. “

“Although the Senate hearing today was beneficial, there is still much work to be done,” said Lance Cooper, founder of The Cooper Firm. “It is more important than ever that the Melton case move forward. It is clear from today’s hearing that GM does not want the public to know the whole truth about what all of its employees, including senior management, knew and when they knew it. Only when the Meltons finally have their day in court will we learn the whole story.”

Beasley went on to say, “General Motors is not only guilty of gross negligence that borders on criminal conduct, but it is clearly guilty of fraud in its dealings with the government, the courts and the American

people. The documents obtained by *The New York Times* are more evidence of an internal cover-up by GM. While GM now says that it will do right by the families of the hundreds of victims who were killed and to the victims who were seriously injured, GM must be punished for what it has done over the period of time when it was covering up the known defect. Unfortunately GM still does not fully accept responsibility for its wrongdoing. Its attempts to blame a few individuals for what was company-wide incompetence and wrongful conduct simply does not meet the 'smell test' and won't be accepted by the American people."

Yesterday, *The New York Times* exposed the death inquiries, which it obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. The purpose of those inquiries was to help federal regulators determine possible defects in GM cars involved in fatal crashes. The documents provide evidence of critical failure on the part of GM and on the part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), as the regulatory agency, to identify and expose the deadly defect. In at least one instance, according to the *Times* piece, GM received outside evidence there was a problem with the ignition switch – from a police report – but ignored the information. The *Times* reports only one person at GM even opened the file, which was then passed along to the NHTSA, which failed to follow up on it.

The ignition switch in these vehicles may move from the "run" position to the "off" or "accessory" position, disabling power steering and brakes during operation, also possibly deactivating the airbags. GM initially recalled about 780,000 2005-07 Chevrolet Cobalt and Pontiac G5 vehicles on Feb. 13. Twelve days later, it expanded the recall to include an additional 590,000 model-year 2003-07 Saturn Ion, Chevy HHR, Pontiac Solstice, and Saturn Sky vehicles. That initial recall now encompasses 2.6 million vehicles, and GM admits to 13 deaths related to the defect. In June, GM recalled an additional 3.4 million midsize and large cars for the same ignition switch defect. In July, GM recalled 17 older model (1997-2005) vehicles. GM attributes seven crashes, three deaths and eight injuries to this latest group of recalled vehicles, which it says allows "inadvertent ignition key rotation." So far, GM has recalled 17.1 million cars this year because of the ignition switch defect.

#### **About The Cooper Firm**

Lance Cooper founded The Cooper Firm in 2006. With experience in substantial personal injury and wrongful death cases, he has represented plaintiffs in numerous civil jury trials and has successfully prosecuted hundreds of cases and gained multi-million dollar verdicts and settlements on behalf of his clients. For more information, visit [www.thecooperfirm.com](http://www.thecooperfirm.com).

#### **About Beasley Allen Law Firm**

Headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama, Beasley Allen is comprised of more than 75 attorneys and over 200 support staff. Beasley Allen is a national leader in civil litigation, with verdicts and settlements in excess of \$22 billion. For more information about our firm, please visit our website at [www.beasleyallen.com](http://www.beasleyallen.com).

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#### **Media Contacts:**

##### **The Cooper Firm:**

Victoria Schneider

(770) 427-5588

(770) 675-6443 direct

[victoria@thecooperfirm.com](mailto:victoria@thecooperfirm.com)

**Beasley Allen:**

Wendi Lewis

(334) 495-1308

(334) 221-3595 cell

(800) 898-2034 x169

[wendi.lewis@beasleyallen.com](mailto:wendi.lewis@beasleyallen.com)