

# Ask Auto Andy

## Recall: Not A Dirty Word

(NAPSA)—Dear Andy:

I just got an ominous looking letter from the manufacturer of my car stating they have issued a recall on some temperature element in my vehicle and it lists my VIN. The letter tells me to take it to a dealer to be replaced. I have no experience with recalls. Is a recall a bad thing? Can you explain what exactly this means? Will I be charged for repairs? Thanks!

—A.C. in Maryland

Dear A.C.:

Fret not! Recall is not necessarily a “bad thing.” Most are precautionary and are, in fact, remedied for free. Yes, I said “FREE.”

A safety recall can be issued on either a whole vehicle or on a piece of equipment within a vehicle, when the manufacturer uncovers a “non-compliance with a Federal motor vehicle safety standard.” In people-speak, that means when a piece of equipment in a specific line of vehicles shows a defect. A recall may also be called for by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), if they discover the defect during rigorous testing.

In most cases, the remedy is as simple as repairing or replacing the equipment in question. It is usually covered by the vehicle’s warranty, or the manufacturer may extend the vehicle’s warranty for the recalled part. Naturally, the sooner you have the recalled item replaced or repaired, the less you have to worry about the performance of your vehicle.

On a related note, while manufacturers attempt to contact all affected vehicle owners, with some 40+ million used vehicles changing hands annually, the task can be daunting. So, while many owners, like A.C., receive an official notification letter, many may not. Also, there may be recalls not taken care of by previous owners (commonly called open recalls). That’s why used car owners and



**Recalls happen periodically to make sure cars and equipment remain up to safety codes.**

even shoppers need to be proactive in learning about existing recalls by taking the following steps:

- Ask the dealer. Ask him if there are any outstanding recalls on the vehicle or its parts. Often dealers remedying one recall will check to see if there are any other open recalls on the vehicle and offer to repair them as well, but it never hurts to ask!

- Visit Carfax.com. Carfax receives recall data from several manufacturers. At [www.carfax.com](http://www.carfax.com) you can perform a free Recall Check, or, for a nominal fee, you can run a detailed vehicle history report using a vehicle’s 17-character identification number (available on the dashboard and title documents) to get a complete picture of the vehicle’s past life.

- Check with NHTSA. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration keeps a comprehensive database of recalls by make, model and year. This isn’t vehicle specific, but it gives you a road map to get there. Their Web site ([www.nhtsa.com](http://www.nhtsa.com)) contains a regularly updated list or you can call them toll-free at 1-888-DASH-2-DOT (888-327-4236).

Now that you know, A.C., go ahead and get your recall remedied and relax.

—Andy