

David,

I am writing in regard to the series of communications between CNN and Toyota over the past few weeks. It is our understanding that CNN intends to air a story later this week which will reference prominently a misleading and inaccurate translation of a Japanese language Toyota document concerning an evaluation conducted on a prototype vehicle in development.

As you are no doubt aware, we have repeatedly presented and explained several critical problems with CNN's translation and understanding of the document, the most significant being that this was a stress test on a prototype vehicle done during the development stages of the Adaptive Cruise Control ("ACC") system in which no meaningful vehicle movement occurred. As a result of this testing, refinements to the ACC were made as further explained again below.

Notwithstanding our repeated explanations, we have not received a satisfactory response from CNN about why it is that CNN intends to proceed with its plans to air a story about this document featuring so called "experts" and consumer "advocates" paid by plaintiffs' lawyers now suing Toyota for money. We frankly do not understand why it is that CNN appears to be willing to rely upon and publicize the biased commentary of those with a financial interest in litigation against Toyota with no scrutiny whatsoever of their motives or the support for their claims. This is particularly irresponsible in a situation like this when these so called "advocates" for consumer safety will be relying upon an inaccurate and misleading translation of a Japanese language document that by its very nature requires significant context to evaluate accurately.

We fear that the information has fallen on deaf ears, and request that you provide us with a response. We believe that as a major network news organization whose broadcasts reach tens of millions of drivers across the nation, CNN has an obligation to provide accurate, fair and balanced coverage of important issues of public safety – and avoid sensationalism.

As an example of CNN's mischaracterization of the evaluation document referenced above, CNN's latest egregiously inaccurate translation, in the very first sentence, contains the phrase "sudden unintended acceleration." This is simply wrong. The translation of "勝手に" should read "by itself" (as it does in the first translation by CNN) or "on its own"...and "発進" should read "starts out." The Japanese language for "sudden unintended acceleration" is "意図せぬ急加速" – there is no reference whatsoever to "sudden unintended acceleration" in the original document. In fact, the translator's own notes accompanying CNN's latest translation for this paragraph - "I added these words based on my understanding of the context" – reinforce the speculation surrounding this entire translation.

In addition, we cannot emphasize strongly enough that the evaluation referenced in the document was performed to check the compatibility in the engine Electronic Control Unit (ECU) and full range ACC ECU during the development stages of a vehicle, before it went into production. Furthermore, it was a stress test intentionally designed to confuse the ACC interaction by artificially creating (and thereby simulating) a failed accelerator pedal sensor. Following the evaluation of this prototype, refinements were made to the full range ACC ECU. Thus, this developmental evaluation in no way reflects any Toyota vehicle in the market, anywhere in the world. Prototype testing of this type in which component failure is intentionally caused is routinely performed by every automobile manufacturer to ensure safety and reliability in the final product. This is routinely done in vehicle development even though the phenomenon artificially created in the test – a physical manipulation of the circuit causing an abnormal signal – does not occur in the real world. Among other reasons, Toyota does this testing to make sure that the vehicle fail-safes operate as designed, as they did in this evaluation. We are certain that CNN has not been provided with any reliable evidence that the condition shown in the prototype vehicle evaluation occurs in the real world and causes uncommanded acceleration. If CNN mistakenly believes that it is in possession of such information, we would be happy to review it and clarify any misconceptions or misrepresentations made concerning such a scenario.

Moreover, as we explained last week, this “best practices” document was created for the purpose of sharing information about a specific engineering principle across various engineering groups within the company. Specifically, the evaluation was looking at the effect of an intentionally created abnormal accelerator pedal signal on the functionality of the ACC when the prototype vehicle was at a stop. The document was created and disseminated to reinforce the importance of considering the compatibility of every electrical circuit when setting the appropriate threshold for detecting a fault or abnormality. This specific principle has broad application in the design of various functions of the electronics. Because this document, like other such “best practices” documents, is intended to convey information about a particular engineering principle, it does not contain a detailed explanation of the test methodology.

Instead, as we have advised you, what is not reflected in the document (because it functions only as a “best practices” advisory) is critical to understanding the results of the evaluation itself. In the evaluation, the following series of events occurred within the prototype vehicle, detailing the extent of the phenomena even if such a highly unlikely event were to occur: 1) while at a stop with the ACC engaged, the signal from the accelerator pedal was intentionally and physically disrupted (the duration of the physical disruption being less than 100 milliseconds); 2) the ACC ECU then released the brake originally engaged by the ACC (this is the “wrong judgment” referred to in your latest translation), essentially allowing the vehicle to “start out on its own”;

3) however, within an additional number of milliseconds of the ACC brake being released, the ACC detected the vehicle in front of it and the brakes were once again applied by the ACC; and 4) in less than 500 milliseconds, the vehicle went into a fail-safe “limp home” mode and the “Check Engine” light came on as designed. Because the entire sequence described above occurred in a matter of milliseconds, the vehicle did not physically move forward in any perceptible way.

As a result of the evaluation, the sensor detection level was changed within a range of hundreds of milliseconds to ensure that the ACC system was receiving and acting on accurate signals from the accelerator pedal reflective of driver intent. Even though this was a test of the pre-production ACC, the evaluation shows that Toyota’s electronics and fail-safes worked as designed to prevent unintended acceleration.

With the above understanding in hand, we remain concerned about CNN’s intention in airing a story about this or any other unsupported theory of unintended acceleration in Toyota’s vehicles. We view this story as an attempt by plaintiffs’ lawyers suing Toyota for money to manufacture doubt about the safety of Toyota’s vehicles in the absence of any scientific evidence whatsoever. The studies conducted by the NHTSA and NASA got it right – there is no evidence that Toyota’s electronics can cause uncommanded acceleration. It is ironic and disheartening that the very document at issue, which is actually evidence of Toyota’s robust vehicle design and pre-production testing, is the apparent centerpiece for CNN’s broadcast.

At this point, we are unaware of the other elements of CNN’s planned broadcast. To the extent that the broadcast will consist of other inaccurate commentary cobbled together to leave the viewer with the impression that Toyota’s vehicles are unsafe, we are profoundly disappointed with this course of action. Toyota has been accountable for the safety of its products. CNN owes its viewers and the American public the same level of candor and commitment to journalistic integrity.

Please note that Toyota reserves the right to take any and every appropriate step to protect and defend the reputation of our company and its products from irresponsible and inaccurate claims made in CNN’s upcoming broadcast.