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Open letter by Denis Gorteman

About the use of product recalls

The recall campaign following the "Dieselgate" crisis is well under way, and by now thousands of vehicles have been recalled already to restore conformity. Through our successive invitations by mail, our communication through the press and on the Internet we are trying to convince all users of the concerned vehicles to carry out the planned update. Nevertheless, we are aware that the update might not be performed at 100% of the vehicles and that as a consequence, a yet undetermined number of vehicles will still be driving around without following the recall.

Admittedly, this is in no way a security problem, and we remind once again that the update will not cause any noticeable changes, for instance in terms of handling, performance, fuel consumption or CO2 emissions.

This, however, doesn't restrain us from reflecting on the issues of actions organized by the manufacturers.

These actions, which are commonly found in the automotive industry, provide a real added value for the customer. They enable us to correct a malfunction that was discovered after the development phase of a product, to preserve the safety of use in order to avoid accidents or just to keep the product up-to-date and faultless, as is this the case for example, with computers or smartphones. The actions implemented proactively by the after-sales services of manufacturers provide added value for the car and guarantee customers that their product is safe and updated for free. Most of these actions are being well followed by our customers, who clearly see the use of it.

However, we note that some drivers do not act upon these actions, including recalls, and that as a result certain vehicles on our roads could constitute a danger to security (due to malfunction of the brakes or airbags, for instance). But what worries us even more is that these vehicles can even be sold without the buyer being informed of the risks.

How can we convince users that all recalls are important and should be performed? On the other hand, how can we ensure that the vehicles we cross on our roads are safe and properly maintained?

During my hearing in the select "Dieselgate" committee in December last year, I made a number of recommendations and I advocated for mandatory verification of recall campaigns on a regular basis and by an independent institution. This mandatory verification could happen during the technical inspection of the vehicle and be registered in the Car Pass, for example. It would guarantee the owner of the vehicle to have a product that meets the requirements of the manufacturer, and it would at the same time benefit the safety on our roads.