

Suzanne Zitser  
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July 23, 2019

The Honorable Rep. Janice D. Schakowsky  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce  
The Honorable Frank Pallone Jr.  
Chairman  
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

To the Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity the Committee has provided to share the story of my Dad's death of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by the flawed design of his keyless ignition vehicle.

On June 28, 2012, my brother, sister and I lost our father, Gerald Zitser, an 86-year-old healthy man, who rode his bicycle, and as an accomplished tenor saxophone player, played in several bands in the Boynton Beach area where he lived. One of his biggest passions was watching the New York Yankees. (He had been in the Navy with Yogi Berra so we were loyal Yankee fans.) The day before, he had gone grocery shopping and drove his keyless ignition Toyota Avalon into his attached garage, brought in the groceries, and closed the garage door. Several hours later he was found in his recliner with the Yankees game on, dead from carbon monoxide poisoning. The key fob was found in this shirt pocket. He had inadvertently left his car running when he shut the garage door. and as he waited for the game to start, poison was leaking into his house.

Shocked by his senseless death, our family started to do some research. How could this have happened? Our father had the key fob with him – how could the engine still be running, especially for an extended period of time? Had this happened to others? An internet search revealed that this was not the first occurrence. In Florida alone, we uncovered several similar deaths. My family resolved to contact Toyota, along with any relevant government agency to suggest that an automatic engine shut-off system that used the vehicle's suite of sensors to detect that it was running unoccupied -- much like the airbags in the passenger side detects no passenger in the seat -- could have prevented this tragedy.

Little did we know that at the time of my father's death, the auto industry and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration were well aware of this problem. In fact, two major automakers were already offering such a feature in their keyless ignition vehicles. This made Toyota's response all the more disappointing: Toyota assigned the incident a case number, and offered to inspect the Avalon for a defect. But, several rounds of correspondence ended with no inspection or resolution.


During the last seven years, my family has been worked with organizations, such as Safety Research & Strategies, and journalists, to educate the motoring public and to encourage lawmakers, NHTSA and the industry to implement a solution.

The PARK IT Act has renewed my family's hopes that solutions will be required by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration -- and that new rules will apply the same type of safety requirements that protect vehicle owners with traditional metal keys. Under the current safety standards, a driver who has a metal key in their pocket can be assured of two things: 1. The engine is off; and 2. The gearshift lever is in Park. Unfortunately, manufacturers and NHTSA have failed to provide these same assurances for keyless vehicles. At the same time vehicles have become quieter, the visual and audible indicators of the state of the engine and ignition state are not always apparent, and the key fob, which drivers are told is the "key" must be in the to start the car, but counterintuitively, the reverse is not true.

This bill will require NHTSA to mandate the very safety features that were intended under Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 114 – and the manufacturers can do so for little to no cost. Several automakers have already made the changes, which can be achieved with small software modifications. Toyota recently announce its intent to begin doing so in most of their 2020 cars. Our family feels it is critical that legislature be passed by Congress to assure that all automakers must provide this minimum level of safety for all car owners.

Thank you for considering my family's story. Hopefully it will provide additional information as to why the PARKIT bill must be passed and made law by Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Suzanne Zitser". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Suzanne Zitser