INSURANCE INSTITUTE
FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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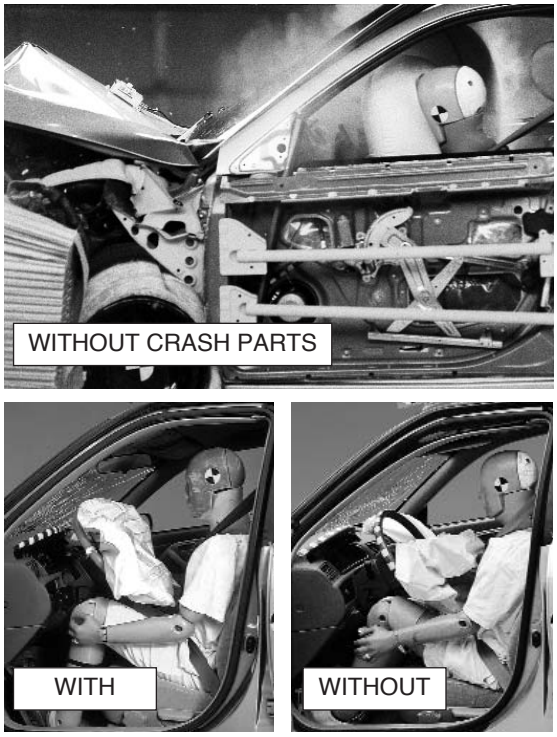
COSMETIC CRASH PARTS ARE IRRELEVANT TO AUTO SAFETY

ARLINGTON, VA — The source of a car's cosmetic crash parts is irrelevant to crashworthiness. This is demonstrated in a new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety crash test of a Toyota Camry from which the front-end cosmetic parts were removed.

Cosmetic repair parts (often called crash parts) include fenders, door skins, bumper covers, and the like. In the continuing debate about whether such parts from aftermarket suppliers are as good as cosmetic parts from original-equipment manufacturers, the issue of safety keeps cropping up. Claims are made that using cosmetic parts from sources other than original-equipment manufacturers could compromise safety. But "these claims are red herrings to try to frighten people. With the possible exception of hoods, there are no safety implications of using cosmetic crash parts from any source," Institute president Brian O'Neill says.



In a 40 mph crash test, the driver space was maintained well in both Camrys, with and without cosmetic crash parts.

To demonstrate the irrelevance of safety in the cosmetic crash parts debate, the Institute tested a 1997 Toyota Camry from which the front fenders, door skins, and front bumper cover were removed. The original-equipment hood was replaced with a certified hood from an aftermarket supplier. The test results then were compared with results from an earlier test of a

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1997 Camry with its original-equipment parts intact. Both Camrys performed with distinction in 40 mph frontal offset impacts. Both earned good crashworthiness ratings according to the Institute's evaluation procedures. This means a Camry that doesn't have any of its front-end cosmetic parts is rated better than most competing midsize cars that still have such parts.

During each crash test, researchers recorded measures on the driver dummy to assess the likelihood that people experiencing the same forces in on-the-road crashes would be injured. These injury measures were similar — well within normal test-to-test variability — for the Camrys with and without cosmetic parts. Measured intrusion into the occupant compartment was similar. Control of the crash test dummies and measured steering column movement also were about the same. Both the original-equipment and aftermarket hoods performed well, buckling as they're designed to do. Neither one was pushed back anywhere near the windshield, so front-seat occupants in real crashes similar to these tests wouldn't be endangered.

"There essentially was no difference in crashworthiness performance. Both Camrys were rated good. The cosmetic parts didn't influence the results," O'Neill says. "Only three other midsize four-door cars we've tested match the Camrys' crashworthiness ratings. In contrast, 11 cars in this class are rated poor. So a Camry without cosmetic parts offers more protection in a serious frontal crash than many competing cars with all cosmetic parts supplied by the original-equipment manufacturer."

This isn't the first time the Institute has used crash tests to demonstrate the irrelevance of safety to the cosmetic crash parts debate. When this controversy heated up in the 1980s, the safety-related claim of the moment was that cars repaired with cosmetic parts from aftermarket suppliers might not comply with federal motor vehicle safety standards. But when a 1987 Ford Escort without its cosmetic parts was crashed into a rigid barrier at 30 mph to measure compliance with the federal motor vehicle safety standards, it met these requirements with room to spare.

End 2-page news release: cosmetic crash parts
Video news release Thurs. 2/17, 1:30-2 pm EST
(c) Telstar 6/Trans. 8; crash test footage & more

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