



Action 9 leads national investigation into rodents chewing on vehicle wires

By Jason Stoogenke, April 29, 2016, Charlotte, N.C.



Many new vehicles now use wiring that has a soy-based coating, which is better for the environment and cheaper to make than the traditional kind.

But apparently, rodents love to gnaw on it, which can cause major electrical problems. That can be dangerous and the repairs can be expensive, and most warranties don't cover that kind of damage. So drivers are forced to file insurance claims, which many would rather not do.

Action 9 investigator Jason Stoogenke led the way in a nationwide investigation with reporters from at least four of WSOC's sister stations.

'Chipmunk been eating all your wires'

Rock Hill resident Ana Rodriguez said she had trouble starting her fairly new Toyota Camry. "I turn on the engine and it doesn't want to go," she said. She took it to the dealer. "They say, 'We have a problem because the chipmunk been eating all your wires.'"

She said she was "very surprised, very, very surprised" and that she "never, never, never, never, never" heard that before.

She took pictures of the frayed wires. The dealer replaced them, but the bill was more than \$2,300. She thought she had no choice but to get her insurance company involved. "It's been all too overwhelming for me," she said.

Rodriguez expects the car companies to fix the problem or cover it under warranty. "Nobody (is) going to change my mind that the manufacturer of those wires, they have to change it," she said.

'Holy cow, what is that about?'

Atlanta resident Collins Brown said he had the same problem with his Honda Accord.

"When they called and said, 'A rodent chewed through a wire in your car,' I thought, 'Holy cow, what is that about?'" he said.

His bill was \$250.

"I'm definitely concerned it could happen again," he said.

Seattle mechanic David Calderon said he's seeing his own evidence of rodents under the hood: "The feces. You'll see feces everywhere underneath."

Mechanics in Tulsa said they're "seeing more rat problems ... with them chewing wires."

It's a hot topic online. One article generated 31 pages of comments.

Some drivers are taking their complaints to the next level, suing Honda in a federal class-action lawsuit. The lawsuit focuses on 2012-15 models. It said rodents "shredded through" wires and that one mechanic caught a rabbit in the engine "still chewing." The lead plaintiffs said repairs cost them hundreds of dollars each.

Stoogenke asked Honda and the maker of Rodriguez's car, Toyota, if they would consider changing the design of the wiring.

Honda acknowledged receiving the request, but that's all since March 22. Toyota sent Stoogenke a statement denying that a problem exists, saying: "We are not aware of any confirmed connection between wiring materials and rodent damage."

Consumer Reports sees a connection and said it's not just Honda and Toyota, but Ford, GM, Subaru and maybe others.

Stoogenke asked federal safety officials to study the issue. He also asked several national consumer watchdog groups to join the conversation. If you want to file a formal complaint,