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Toyota recalls millions of cars worldwide

Robert Lea, Susan Thompson

Tens of thousands of Toyota owners in Britain have been warned that their cars could have faulty airbags, driver's seats and steering columns amid the biggest recall by the Japanese manufacturer since it grounded millions of vehicles in 2010.

Experts said that the latest reverse for Toyota, the world's biggest motor manufacturer, had left its reputation for quality and reliability damaged again. The company has issued recall notices on nearly seven million vehicles around the world, including more than 35,000 in the UK.

In Britain, Toyota told nearly 25,000 drivers of its RAV4 small 4x4 vehicles and its Hilux small pick-up trucks built between 2004 and 2010 to get a new airbag cable fitted. More than another 10,000 drivers of the Yaris hatchback and the four-wheel drive Urban Cruiser

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models built between 2005 and 2010 require inspection of the rails on which their seats sit and a bracket on the steering column.

The breadth of the global warning recalled the meltdown at Toyota when problems relating to accelerator pedals affected 10 million vehicles around the world. It also included an alert on the braking system of the Prius, the group's award-winning petrol-electric hybrid.

Toyota Great Britain played down the latest warning and pointed out that the number of vehicles affected was about a fifth of the 2010 numbers. It said that the need for the recall was a result of the "revolution" that had happened in its internal system of controls since the 2010 problems. The latest recalls have come a month after Toyota agreed to pay \$1.2 billion (£717 million) in the US after it admitted deliberately hiding safety defects.

Jonathan Hemus, head of the reputa-

tion management consultancy Insignia, said: "Toyota has been all about quality and reliability, and that has taken another massive knock. In the consumer's mind this is not Toyota doing a good job of dealing with it, it is about Toyota having yet another problem."

A spokesman for Toyota in the UK said that the company had taken "a number of measures in the past to rededicate ourselves to strengthening our commitment to safety and quality by instigating new processes and organisational management. "If this means conducting another recall then we will do this to ensure we are putting our customers first and taking the appropriate action they would expect from us."

None of the vehicles recalled was built at Toyota's British assembly plant, which is in Burnaston, Derbyshire. Toyota said that it would be contacting UK owners, and those in doubt could phone a helpline: 0800 1388 744.