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What to do when your car is recalled

When a vehicle recall is announced, many drivers worry that their cars are unsafe. In reality, recalls are a routine part of automotive quality control. Here is what experts say you should do if your car appears on a recall list.



No cause for alarm. More than 550,000 Highlander and Hybrid models (2021-2024) were recalled due to the need to properly align the seats. There is no reason for alarm for those who own these cars here in Uganda, as most of the recalled vehicles are in the United States," says James Ojambo, a car importer.

BY GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA

Moses Bikala was startled to learn online that his favourite vehicle, the Toyota Highlander, had been recalled for further mechanical scrutiny. Since then, he has become hesitant to drive the car, fearing it may be faulty. As a precaution, he has temporarily parked it and opted to use a Mercedes-Benz E-Class, which he believes offers greater safety.

But is there really anything wrong with Bikala's Highlander?

Experts say when cars are recalled, it does not necessarily mean they are not road-worthy. A vehicle recall does not automatically imply that all models are unsafe to drive. In many cases, manufacturers such as Toyota issue recalls for specific models as a preventive safety measure after identifying a potential defect in a particular batch, component, or production period. The problem may only affect vehicles produced within certain dates or fitted with specific parts.

Minor defects, major reassurance

James Ojambo, a car importer, explains that vehicle recalls are usually issued to address specific mechanical or safety concerns identified by manufacturers. Accord-

ing to Ojambo, such recalls should not always alarm vehicle owners because they often involve minor defects that can easily be rectified.

For example, he notes that the Toyota Highlander was recently recalled over a suspected fault in which the second-row seatbacks might not lock properly into position. If left unaddressed, this defect could increase the risk of injury to passengers during a crash.

Ojambo emphasises that recalls are a normal part of quality control in the automotive industry, allowing manufacturers to correct faults and ensure vehicles continue to meet safety standards.

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Why manufacturers recall vehicles

Leading vehicle manufacturers such as Toyota, Mercedes-Benz, Volvo, Ford Motor Company, and Volkswagen occasionally recall some of their vehicles due to safety or quality concerns. Like many consumer products, vehicles can be recalled when defects emerge in one or more components.

These faults may affect critical systems such as braking, airbags, steering, electrical wiring, or fuel delivery. Once identified through internal quality checks or customer complaints, manufacturers initiate recalls to fix the defects and prevent potential safety risks.

In most cases, a recall requires the manufacturer to repair, replace, or update the

WHAT IS A VIN AND WHERE CAN YOU FIND IT?

A Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is a unique 17-character code assigned to every vehicle during manufacturing. It acts like a fingerprint for the car, containing information about the manufacturer, model, engine type, and year of production.

Car manufacturers and authorised dealers use the VIN to identify whether a particular vehicle is affected by a recall. You can usually find your VIN in several places, including:

- On the lower corner of the windscreen on the driver's side
 - On a sticker or plate inside the driver's door frame
 - On the vehicle registration or logbook
 - In your insurance documents
- Entering this number on the manufacturer's official website or checking with an authorised dealer can quickly confirm whether your vehicle is affected by a recall.

defective parts at no cost to the vehicle owner. The process is intended to protect consumers, enhance product safety, and ensure that vehicles on the road comply with established safety and quality standards.

Recalls in Uganda and the region

In Uganda, although Kiira Motor Corporation, the manufacturer of electric and diesel-powered vehicles including the Kayoola EVS and Kayoola Coach, has never recalled any of its products, Ruth Nasejje, the senior product and process information Officer at Kiira Motors, agrees that most vehicle recalls are issued when manufacturers identify specific defects that require rectification.

"Usually, vehicle manufacturers recall vehicles when they discover defects

or safety risks that could affect performance, safety, or compliance with regulations," says Nasejje.

Kia Motors has also issued a statement, particularly for the 2025 Sorento models, citing a software issue that affects the operation of affecting headlight intensity while driving at night, highlighting the small software glitches can have implications.

Between 2023 and 2024, Toyota carried out major recalls on models such as the Corolla, Camry, and Tundra, mainly in the American and Australian markets. Experts say some Ugandan motorists who imported these cars were affected, but there were no formal notices issued during the global campaign.

Reports indicate that several vehicles between 2023 and 2024 from Toyota were largely driven by cases of electrical system malfunctions, software-related glitches, and compliance concerns, collectively affecting millions of vehicles worldwide.

Meanwhile, Tesla, one of the world's largest electric vehicle manufacturers, recorded over five million recalled vehicles in 2024. Many of these issues were resolved through over-the-air (OTA) software updates, highlighting how digital vehicle systems allow manufacturers to fix certain defects remotely without requiring owners to visit a dealership.

Improved recall trends

Ford has reportedly made improvements in reducing recalls over the past three years. In 2022, the manufacturer issued 8.7 million recalls, but by 2024 this number had dropped to 4.5 million.

This improvement underscores the renewed emphasis on quality assurance, early defect detection, and more efficient production systems. By identifying potential faults earlier in the manufacturing process, the automotive industry is making a commitment to delivering safer, more dependable vehicles and strengthening its approach to risk management and restoring customer trust.

At the beginning of 2026, South Africa also recorded major recalls affecting more than 50,000 vehicles, focusing on safety defects such as Takata airbag inflators, brakes, and handbrake issues.

The key recalls involved models such as the Volkswagen Polo Vivo (handbrake), Ford Ranger, and BMW, alongside vehicles from Stellantis and Kia. Manufacturers issued advisory notices urging owners of affected vehicles, largely produced between 2015 and 2025, to approach authorised service providers for immediate inspection.

Closer to home, Toyota Nigeria Limited (TNL) last week announced safety recalls affecting about 900 RAV4 models produced between 2006 and 2011 and sold into the Nigerian market.

Kunle Ade-Ojo, managing director of TNL, said the recall followed a field service report suggesting that, in the event of an accident, the car's passenger seat belts could fail to function as intended.

Ade-Ojo noted that although no such incidents had been recorded, Toyota often takes preventive and precautionary measures to ensure the safety of its customers worldwide.

Vehicle recalls should not be a source of panic for drivers. They are part of a global system designed to keep motorists safe. For owners such as Bikala, a simple VIN check and prompt dealer visit can turn an anxiety into reassurance and ensure a safe return to the road.