

CHAPTER 3
INVESTIGATION OF SAFETY RESTRAINT SYSTEM FAILURES
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CHAPTER 3

INVESTIGATION OF SAFETY RESTRAINT SYSTEM FAILURES

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this chapter is to establish policy and procedures for Multidisciplinary Accident Investigation Team (MAIT) documentation of suspected safety restraint system failures which occur during fatal or suspected serious-injury crashes. A safety restraint system failure occurs when the safety restraint system did not properly function as intended.

2. POLICY.
 - a. When a fatal or suspected serious-injury traffic crash occurs and an Area suspects a failure of the safety restraint system worn or used by the injured party, the appropriate Division commander shall be notified and a MAIT may be consulted. Prior to notification, the investigating officer shall conduct a visual inspection of the safety restraint system and document any observed abnormalities or damage.

 - b. Safety restraint systems include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - (1) Seatbelts and seatbelt pretensioners.
 - (2) Airbags.
 - (3) Child passenger restraint systems.
 - (4) Windshields.

 - c. Upon notification that a crash has occurred in which a failure of the safety restraint system is suspected, and with the appropriate Division approval, a MAIT may conduct an investigation. Refer to paragraph 6.c.(2) of Chapter 1, General, of this manual. The investigation may be conducted as a supplemental report to the Area's investigation of the crash. Except as provided below, a MAIT may inspect the vehicle to verify that a failure of the restraint system occurred.
 - (1) If a vehicle is suspected of having sustained a safety restraint system failure but has not been impounded, a MAIT shall make a reasonable attempt to conduct an inspection.

 - d. A MAIT shall not be called out after normal business hours solely to inspect a suspected safety restraint system failure. An inspection should generally be completed during normal business hours.

e. When a fatal or suspected serious-injury traffic crash occurs and an Area suspects a failure of the safety restraint system, the event data recorder should be imaged, if equipped.

NOTE: An event data recorder is defined by the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 49, Subtitle B, Chapter V, Part 563.5 as “a device or function in a vehicle that records the vehicle’s dynamic time-series data during the time period just prior to a crash event (e.g., vehicle speed vs. time) or during a crash event (e.g., delta-V vs. time), intended for retrieval after the crash event. For the purposes of this definition, the event data do not include audio and video data.”

f. A MAIT shall contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to report any confirmed safety restraint system failures identified through their investigation.

(1) NHTSA Vehicle Safety Hotline: 1-888-327-4236.

(2) NHTSA Office of Defects Investigation: (202) 366-4328 or (202) 366-0328.

(3) NHTSA website: www.nhtsa.gov

NOTE: The NHTSA website and toll-free telephone numbers are designed primarily with the vehicle owner in mind but may also be used to report safety restraint system failures identified as a result of a MAIT investigation.

g. Filing and distribution of the report shall be in compliance with Chapter 5, Report Format and Composition, of this manual.