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## Toyota orders inspections after deadly SoCal crash

By ROBERT JABLON Associated Press Writer © 2009 The Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES — Toyota said Tuesday it will order all dealers to inspect their cars for mismatched floor mats after a mat was suspected of snagging a gas pedal on a runaway Lexus, ending with a fiery crash that killed four family members in San Diego County.

Toyota Motor Sales, USA Inc. planned to issue an order Wednesday to about 1,400 Toyota and Lexus dealers nationwide to make sure each of their new, used and loaner vehicles had the proper floor mats and that the mats were properly secured, said Brian Lyons, a spokesman for the Torrance-based company.

Customers who are concerned should also make sure they have the proper mats.

"If there's any doubt in their mind about the security and shape of their mat, go ahead and visit the dealer" to have them checked, Lyons said.

California Highway Patrol Officer [REDACTED] 45, and three others were killed Aug. 28 on State Route 125 in Santee, a town near San Diego. The runaway car was doing more than 120 mph when it hit a sport utility vehicle, launched off an embankment, rolled several times and burst into flames.

The SUV driver was treated for moderate injuries.

In addition to [REDACTED] who was a 19-year CHP

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veteran, the crash killed his wife, [REDACTED] their daughter, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] brother-in-law, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] made a 911 call about a minute before the crash to say the vehicle had no brakes and the accelerator was stuck.

The call ends with someone telling people in the car to hold on and pray, followed by a woman's scream.

The family was in a 2009 Lexus ES 350 that was loaned by a dealer, Bob Baker Lexus El Cajon, while their own vehicle was being serviced.

Investigators with National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have determined that a rubber all-weather floor mat found in the wreckage was a couple of inches longer than the mat that belonged in the vehicle.

That could have snared or covered the accelerator pedal.

"We don't know if the all-weather floor mat was properly secured or not," he said. "We do know that it was a floor mat from a different Lexus."

A call left for Dave Ezratty, a vice president at the dealership, was not immediately returned Tuesday.

Lyons said most Toyotas come with carpeted floor mats, but all-weather mats are sold as accessories.

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After the accident, Toyota officials contacted the dealer and told him to check the mats in cars, Lyons said.

"It's really nothing different than what we're going to instruct all the dealers" to do, he added.

The driver could have put the car in neutral to disengage the engine from the automatic transmission, Lyons said.

The driver also could have turned off the electronically keyed car by holding down the start switch for three seconds, but that could have locked the steering wheel, turned off the headlights and cut power-assist to the brakes, Lyons said.

Lyons said the company had not had any complaints about mismatched floor mats.

In 2007, the company did recall all-weather mats from some of its Lexus ES 350s and Toyota Camrys after complaints that they could slip and trap the accelerator.

However, this crash was unrelated to the mats that were pulled from the market during the recall, Lyons said.

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