

Some SUVs

Flip on Side

In Crash Test

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WASHINGTON—The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said three sport-utility vehicles flipped during a crash test, increasing chances that federal regulators may adopt tougher rules designed to prevent such rollover crashes.

A Honda CR-V, an Isuzu Rodeo and a Kia Sportage rolled onto their sides when struck in the side, according to people with knowledge of the matter. This marks the first time vehicles have done so in side-impact testing by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Many experts consider certain sport-utility vehicles more likely to flip than other vehicles, because of their height and relative narrowness.

The results highlight one of the longest-running, most intractable auto safety issues. In 1997, the most recent year for which statistics are available, more than 9,400 people in the U.S. died when their cars, trucks or vans flipped. Rollover fatalities more than doubled over the past decade among SUV occupants, to 1,482 in 1997, as the rugged vehicles have become top sellers with the American public.

The NHTSA had already been running extensive tests designed to determine which vehicles are prone to rollover accidents. Last year, the agency tested a dozen vehicles, which were jerked around sharp angles at speeds of up to 60 miles an hour by computerized steering machines. Agency officials have declined to comment about those results.

But the flips occurred in a very different type of test, intended to gauge the vehicle's ability to protect occupants in a side-impact crash, not their tendency to roll over.

A spokesman for **Kia Motors Corp.** declined to comment. A **Honda Motor Co.** spokesman said he would have to check the details before responding. **Isuzu Motors Ltd.** couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

In the side-impact test, a moving barrier covered in collapsible aluminum honeycomb comes at the vehicle at an angle.

Two of the tests, for the Honda and the Isuzu, were done as part of the NHTSA's consumer-information safety-rating program. The other was part of standard federal safety standards testing for side-impact crashes.

Though other sport-utility vehicles have been reported to roll over during road tests; including the Suzuki Samurai and the Jeep CJ, it was the first time such results have been publicly reported by the government. That could hurt sales of the vehicles, which are popular with safety-conscious families.