



WASHINGTON — Hyundai Motor Co. said it is voluntarily recalling 139,500 Sonata sedans in the U.S. because of a manufacturing defect that could cause drivers to lose steering control.

The recall affects 2011 models built between Dec. 11, 2009 and Sept. 10, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration noted on its website Sunday. Some of the cars have steering column shafts with connections that may not have been tightened enough or were improperly assembled. As a result, the steering wheel could become separated from the column or a driver could lose the ability to properly steer the car.

The U.S. government had opened an investigation into possible steering problems in the vehicle in August. Hyundai, South Korea's top automaker, has said there have been no related injuries or crashes reported.

Owners of affected vehicles can go to their dealers for inspection. Dealers also will update power steering software. Owners may also call NHTSA at 888-327-4236 for more information.

The recall comes as automakers ramp up their focus on safety and quality control in the wake of Toyota Motor Corp.'s massive global recall last year over gas pedal and floor mat problems. In February, Hyundai announced a recall of about 47,000 Sonata midsize sedans, mostly sold in South Korea, to replace front door latches following a handful of customer complaints. The company said it had discovered a mechanical problem with the latches which, in rare instances, would not close properly.

Earlier this month, Hyundai affiliate Kia Motors said Chung Sung-eun resigned as vice chairman following a global recall of more than 100,000 vehicles due to defective wiring. Of that total, 35,185 vehicles were recalled in the United States. Together, Kia and Hyundai form the world's fifth-largest automotive group.

So far this year, U.S. sales are up 17 percent for Hyundai Motor America, though August sales fell 11 percent from a year-earlier record sparked by federal Cash for Clunkers rebates. The new Sonata has been selling well and nearly doubled its sales numbers to 21,399 in August.