

Wheels: An e-mail from Pattie says, “My 2000 GMC Sierra pickup has a factory installed passenger side airbag on/off switch. I had a driver’s side airbag switch installed by an out-of-state company after purchase (I had Government approval). Lately, upon starting the engine, the airbag readiness light on the instrument panel stays on when the driver’s switch is in the off position and goes off when the switch is turned to on. The owner’s manual says when this light stays on, the airbag may act improperly including inappropriate deployment. The out-of-state switch company assures me that as long as their switch is in the off position, deployment will not happen even though the light is on. However, a former installer for this company, who operates a shop specializing in automotive electronics, disagrees. I do not know what to believe. I need an impartial opinion. If the readiness light is on, could the driver’s airbag deploy when the switch is off?”

Halderman: The airbag warning light comes on if the controller (airbag computer) detects a fault in the system. The controller sends a small electrical signal through the wiring to check all the components and connectors. If one connection is not making good contact, the airbag warning light will be turned on and a trouble code set. I doubt the airbag will deploy because the switch opens the electrical path to the inflator module. I am surprised that anyone would want to disable a safety device. Today’s airbags use less force than they did when they first appeared over 10 years ago. I think they are a great safety feature that has saved many lives as long as your head is not against the steering wheel when it deploys.

