

Ford pinto ethics



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Recall of the Pinto The Pinto does indeed need to be recalled, on the basis of a faulty design of the fuel tank, because it has caused some deaths. This report details the key ethical and design issues that were relevant in arriving at the decision.

At the outset, the faulty tank was not an inadvertent error, rather Ford was aware that the design was faulty, because of the results of the crash tests. Eleven Pintos were subjected to rear end collision tests at average speeds of 31 miles per hour, in order to determine if there was any fuel loss. The results of these tests showed that in the case of eight of the Pintos, the fuel tank failed. The other three survived only because special measures had been taken to prevent the rupture of the tank such as (a) plastic baffle between the axle housing and the gas tank (b) steel plate between the tank and the rear bumper and (c) a rubber lining in the gas tank. The results of the test therefore show clearly, that the fuel tank failed, yet the Company did not take any action to remedy the defect. Three of the cars fared better when some special measures were introduced, and the Company had this evidence on hand as well but this still did not factor as significant enough to merit some remedial work being carried out by the Company before getting the cars on to the market. Ford was therefore deficient in its duty of care, because when faced with such results, it should have taken greater care to ensure that the defect in the fuel tank was remedied.

Secondly, there are ethical issues that need to be considered as well. The crash test results suggest that there was a danger posed to life and limb as a result of the defective fuel tanks. The question of ensuring safety of future consumers and users of the cars should have therefore been paramount in Ford's decision as to whether to continue manufacturing the Pintos or not.

However, in arriving at the decision on whether or not to market the Pintos despite the defect in the fuel tank which had been discovered, the Company had decided that in order to be competitive, the car should not cost more than \$2000 and weigh more than 2000 pounds. This raises the issue of whether Ford considered its competitiveness more seriously or whether it valued the potential loss of life more seriously. Had the latter been the case, it would have taken steps to ensure that the fuel tank was replaced with a rupture proof fuel tank, which would have been somewhat more expensive. It would have also rendered the Pinto less competitive because it would have used up valuable trunk space. Hence, the decision that was made was in favour of competitiveness rather than valuing human life. Hence, from an ethical standpoint, the decision that was made on the basis of a cost/benefit analysis where a monetary value was placed on human life, may not have been right and it may be justifiable to recall the Pinto despite the financial losses that may be caused to Ford.

Thirdly, there were several stages in the production process where the problems with the Pinto surfaced and the decision to proceed with the manufacture could have been recalled, especially in view of the potentially huge losses in terms of loss of life. But at no stage on the process did Ford make the decision to recall or stop the manufacture of the Pinto, hence Ford knowingly continue to manufacture the car despite a strong awareness of the potential defects and the need to recall the Pinto. On this basis, if a decision is made to recall the Pinto, it may be justified.