



U.S. President Barack Obama's budget proposal for fiscal 2016 would nearly triple funding for NHTSA, boosting a budget that has flatlined for about ten years.

NHTSA Administrator Mark Rosekind, who took office in late December, has said several times since then that his agency is woefully underfunded, telling reporters last month that the resource shortage was “more severe than I realised from the outside.”

The White House has proposed allocating \$31.3m to NHTSA's Office of Defect Investigation, up from around \$11m for the current fiscal year. The request would more than double the office's headcount from 51 to 108 employees, including some 22 engineers, plus additional investigators, statisticians and other workers to bolster the department's ability to detect and analyse safety defects.

The boost is part of a proposed plan to spend nearly \$6bn on NHTSA over the next six years, including \$908m in the 2016 fiscal year, a nine-percent increase from the agency's current \$830m budget, most of which funds highway project grants administered by the states.

NHTSA faced heavy criticism from lawmakers and safety advocates last year over what were seen as lapses in the agency's handling of ignition switch and airbag inflator cases wherein deadly safety defects festered for years before leading to massive recalls.

Lawmakers have generally supported calls for increased funding for the agency, but several have pressed for broader reforms as well, such as expanded enforcement powers and a more arms-length relationship with the auto industry.