

Mercedes-Benz urges Canada to use European standards

The Globe and Mail

Published Monday, Dec. 23 2013, 5:33 AM EST

Last updated Monday, Dec. 23 2013, 10:53 AM EST

The federal government should accept European standards for new vehicles, which would open the Canadian market to more vehicles and to advanced safety features not available in Canada now, says the president of Mercedes-Benz Canada Inc.

The fact that Mercedes and other offshore-based auto makers have to make their vehicles comply with unique Canadian tests adds costs and delays the entry of some new vehicles or keeps them out altogether, Tim Reuss told a group of reporters.

“Are you really going to say that a car that has been deemed safe enough and environmentally okay for Europe is not environmentally okay and safe to be driven in Canada or vice versa?” Mr. Reuss asked.

If European tests were accepted, Mercedes-Benz would immediately bring in the subcompact A-class car and offer new technology such as brake lights that flash if they sense a following driver is about to crash into a car from behind, he said.

The all-wheel drive version of the Sprinter commercial van would already be available in Canada, instead of its scheduled date of arrival in early 2015.

BMW Canada Inc. said it would also be able to expand its lineup in Canada and offer more engine options, a spokesman said.

The issue has arisen in the wake of the Canada-EU free-trade agreement, which will gradually eliminate the 6.1-per-cent tariff European-based auto makers face on vehicles they import to Canada from outside North America, but keeps the separate regulatory regimes in place. Canadian standards generally match those put in

place by U.S. regulators, although there are some Canada-only requirements.

“The 6.1-per-cent tariff – that’s not the biggie,” Mr. Reuss said. “The biggie is the different set of regulations and standards we have to comply with in Europe and in North America.”

Mercedes-Benz would be able to sell a few thousand A-class models a year, he said, putting the sales volume between the B-class compact car and the GLK crossover. The auto maker sold 3,000 B-class cars through the end of November and 5,150 GLK crossovers.

Mr. Reuss noted that there is a precedent in North America. Mercedes-Benz can sell vehicles in Mexico with European or North American certification.

The issue has also arisen recently in the United States, which is engaged in its own set of negotiations with Europe on a free-trade agreement.

“The U.S. and Europe have the most advanced auto safety regulations in the world and in many cases, the differences between the standards are very modest,” Rob Strassburger, vice-president of safety and harmonization of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said in a statement last week.

The alliance is a Washington-based lobby group whose members include the Detroit Three, as well as Mercedes-Benz USA and other Europe and Japan-based auto makers.

The University of Michigan and Sweden’s Chalmers University will conduct a study to examine whether vehicles produced to U.S. safety standards and driven on European roads provide the same benefits as vehicles built to European standards. The study will also examine the safety experience of European-certified vehicles driven on U.S. roads.