



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

MAR 03 2005

NVS-216 jcc
Ref. No. 10108907

Colebrook, NH

Dear

Thank you for your correspondence dated December 26, 2004, concerning the problems you have encountered with your 1999 Dodge Dakota vehicle. Your correspondence was received on January 4, 2005. Due to limited resources we were not able to respond to you in a more timely manner. We regret any inconvenience our delay may have caused you.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is the Federal agency responsible for improving safety on our Nation's highways. We are authorized to order manufacturers to recall and repair vehicles or items of motor vehicle equipment when our investigations indicate that they contain serious safety defects in their design, construction, or performance. We also monitor the adequacy of manufacturers' recall campaigns.

On July 16, 2003, NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) opened a safety defect investigation (PE03-032) into reports alleging failure of the suspension system, specifically the upper ball joint, in 1998 through 2003 Dodge Durango vehicles. On November 19, 2003, ODI upgraded that investigation to an engineering analysis (EA03-023) and refined the scope of the investigation to include only 2000 through 2002 Dodge Durango and Dakota vehicles. An engineering analysis is a more detailed and complete technical analysis of the character and scope of an alleged defect.

During the course of its investigation, ODI observed that the vast majority of wheel separations occurred in 2000 through 2003 vehicles. This population, manufactured between January 7, 1999 and December 31, 2002, contained maintenance-free upper ball joints supplied by New Castle Machine. A laboratory test comparison of these ball joints to the TRW-supplied ball joints found in the earlier 1997 through 1999 vehicles indicated that the New Castle Machine ball joints were far more prone to separations than the TRW ball joints. This difference is also reflected in field data collected. Field data indicated that 80 to 90 percent of the upper ball joint-related separations reported involved four-wheel drive vehicles. While both vehicle populations are the subject of numerous upper ball joint wear complaints, which NHTSA considers to be a customer satisfaction concern, only the later model years equipped with the New Castle ball joint show a related wheel separation trend.

DaimlerChrysler Corporation is conducting a recall campaign (NHTSA Campaign -596) to remedy four-wheel drive versions of 2000 through 2003 Dodge Durango and vehicles for a defect determined to exist with the upper ball joints, which could result in



DOT AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE
888-DASH-2-DOT
888-327-4236

wheel separation. On February 11, 2005, ODI closed EA03-023. For your information, we have enclosed a copy of the closing resume for PE03-032, a copy of the closing resume for EA03-023, and the summary for NHTSA Campaign No. 04V-596.

You can contact our toll-free DOT Auto Safety Hotline (Hotline) at 1-888-DASH-2-DOT (1-888-327-4236). One of our representatives may be able to assist you on matters concerning motor vehicle and motor vehicle equipment safety recalls or to report an alleged safety problem. You can also request safety information. If our telephones are busy, or you call during non-working hours, you can leave your name, telephone number, and a brief subject on our recording system. A DOT Hotline representative will return your call.

Additionally, we have an Internet Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov> that you may want to visit. An electronic Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) is also available on this Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivoq>. This form is for vehicle owners to report safety related problems about their motor vehicles or motor vehicle equipment, e.g., child safety seats, jacks, tires, brake fluid, etc. The reports submitted are transferred to our database and are used to identify safety-related defect trends that require our attention. If you do not have access to the Internet, please use the enclosed VOQ to inform this agency of any future motor vehicle or motor vehicle equipment safety problems you may experience. Also, a summary listing of vehicle owners' complaints, safety recalls, manufacturers' service bulletins, etc., can be obtained at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems>.

If further assistance is needed, please contact Mr. Michael J. Jordan, Safety Defects Program Assistant, Correspondence Research Division, Office of Defects Investigation, at (202) 493-0576.

Sincerely,

Alberto A. Jimenez, Chief
Correspondence Research Division
Office of Defects Investigation
Enforcement