

JAN 8 2006

[REDACTED]
New York, NY [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

NVS-216 aac
Ref. No. 10158400

Thank you for your correspondence sent to the White House and dated April 21. Your correspondence was forwarded to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for response.

Your most recent correspondence refers to your previous letters to NHTSA dated October 27, 2005, and January 17, 2006, and to a December 22, 2005 response to your first letter from NHTSA's Senior Associate Administrator for Vehicle Safety, Ronald L. Medford. We received your January 17 response to Mr. Medford's letter. After receiving it, a member of our staff attempted unsuccessfully to reach you by telephone.

All of your letters concern issues raised related to the death of your mother in a car crash in 2005. On behalf of NHTSA, please accept my sincere condolences. I certainly understand and commend your efforts to ensure that a similar crash does not occur.

You raised two issues in relation to your mother's crash: (1) whether air bags should be re-designed so that they remain inflated during multiple-impact crashes, and (2) whether the seat belt locking mechanism in your mother's 1998 Honda Accord functioned properly.

You state in your January 17 letter that the air bags were not designed to provide protection in a multiple-impact crash and that this constitutes a design failure in the air bags. While it is true that frontal air bags are generally not designed for multiple-impact crashes, this does not constitute a design failure.

As you may be aware, frontal air bags are vented by design so that they can dissipate the occupant's energy and reduce the potential for injury with interior components. Most frontal air bags provide protection for only the first significant crash, and the safety belt and other measures

checkboxes

DATE

RTG SYMBOL

INITIALS/REQ

DATE

RTG SYMBOL

INITIALS/REQ

DATE

RTG SYMBOL

INITIALS/REQ

DATE

RTG SYMBOL

INITIALS/REQ

DATE

RTG SYMBOL

INITIALS/REQ

DATE

RTG SYMBOL

INITIALS/REQ

DATE

are relied upon for supplemental crash protection. Simply keeping the air bag inflated for an extended period of time could have the unintended consequence of reducing its effectiveness in providing occupant energy absorption (or cushioning) during a crash event.

Furthermore, there are inherent difficulties in designing air bags that would be responsive to multiple impacts in a single crash. I am hopeful, however, that as NHTSA works on this problem by collecting the necessary data, this problem can be overcome by deploying advanced air bag technologies to improve occupant protection systems.

With regard to the seat belt locking mechanism in your mother's car, I instructed the NHTSA defect investigations staff to review our records on 1998 Honda Accords. While I understand your claim that the safety belt in this model failed, our records do not indicate a significant number of failures that would warrant a recall at this time.

Again, you have my sincere condolences. Please contact me directly or Mr. Dan Smith, Associate Administrator for Enforcement, at 202-366-9700 if you have further questions.

Sincerely yours,

Original Signed By

Michael W. Harrington
Director of External Affairs

NHTSA: NVS-210: Consumer Response
NVS-216: aalonso ext:6-6903
NHTSA Control No. ES06-003100
SI0#060522-005
ODI Control No. 10158400
Draft: 5/26/06 aae, redraft 5/31/06
Revised:
Final: mec 06/02/06, 6/08/06 aae
cc:
NEC-110, NIA-110, NVS-010, NVS-200, NVS-216,
Subject/Chron/Optical Disk/CRD
I:\Congress FY2006\10158400

[Redacted]
New York, NY [Redacted]

NVS-216 aao
Ref. No: 10158400

Dear [Redacted]

Thank you for your correspondence sent to the White House and dated April 21. Your correspondence was forwarded to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for response.

On behalf of NHTSA, please accept our sincere condolences for the tragic death of your mother in a car crash in 2005. We certainly understand and commend your efforts to ensure that a similar crash does not occur. Our primary mission at NHTSA is to help reduce the frequency and severity of such crashes through developing and enforcing Federal vehicle safety standards, ensuring the recall of defective vehicles and equipment, and promoting educational efforts on highway safety.

NHTSA's Senior Associate Administrator for Vehicle Safety, Ronald L. Medford, wrote to you on December 22, 2005 concerning two issues you had raised in relation to your mother's crash: (1) whether air bags should be re-designed so that they remain inflated during multiple impact crashes, and (2) whether the seat belt locking mechanism in your mother's 1998 Honda Accord functioned properly.

Mr. Medford explained some of the difficulties inherent in trying to design air bags that would be responsive to multiple impacts in a single crash, which our standards currently do not require. He also noted that, as we collect more data on such events, we may ultimately be able to employ advanced technologies to improve occupant protection systems. However, we are not currently pursuing regulatory changes to address occupant protection in multiple impact crashes. Instead, we are focusing our limited regulatory resources on areas that we hope will address the largest volume of fatal crashes, such as rollovers. For a summary of our regulatory and research priorities, please see our report on that subject at the Laws and Regulations portion of our website, www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

With regard to the seatbelt locking mechanism in your mother's car, Mr. Medford explained that reports such as yours are entered into a database to help us determine whether there is a pattern in a reported defective condition. We have reviewed information available to us concerning the locking mechanism in 1998 Honda Accords and do not detect such a trend. The reason we look for such trends is so that we can focus our investigative resources on possible defects that may potentially affect large numbers of people and pose an unreasonable risk to safety. However tragic and regrettable an individual crash may be, we can expend investigative resources only when we see some indication that a defect involving multiple vehicles may exist. If you would like to learn more about our defects investigation process or see information on any vehicle that concerns you, please see the Office of Defects Investigation area of our website.

We did receive your January 17 response to Mr. Medford's letter. A member of our staff attempted unsuccessfully to reach you by telephone, as your letter suggested we might do. We are sorry that we were apparently not persistent enough in that effort to ensure that contact was made.

We regret that we are not able to provide a more satisfactory response, but, for the reasons explained, we are not able at this time to take the regulatory and investigative actions that you have recommended.

Sincerely yours,

Michael W. Harrington
Director of External Affairs

NHTSA: NVS-210: Consumer Response
NVS-216: aalonso ext:6-6903
NHTSA Control No. ES06-003100
S10#060522-005
ODI Control No. 10158400
Draft: 5/26/06 aae, redraft 5/31/06
Revised:
Final: mec 06/02/06
cc:
NEC-110, NIA-110, NVS-010, NVS-200, NVS-216,
Subject/Chron/Optical Disk/CRD
I:\Congress FY2006\10158400