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Du Pont, WA [redacted]
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US Department of Transportation
Office of Defects Investigation, NVS-210
400 7thST SW
Washington, DC 20077-8214

RE: Dodge Durango 2001 – Defective electric switch / door locks

This is a short narrative to explain the concern and difficulty I encountered during ownership of the Dodge Durango I own.

As a Department of Defense employee working in Seoul, Korea I purchased this vehicle from another US DOD employee as I transitioned into retirement. The vehicle was purchased with approximately 14,000 original miles registered. The low mileage was due to the fact that the gas mileage of the Durango was very poor in this city of 10 million people and not suited to traffic conditions or the expense of operation at high gas prices. Additionally a government vehicle was provided for work related travel for this employee.

I purchased the vehicle knowing the above fact but since my driving needs would be in a different environment (geographical and need). I arrived in WA State in August 2006 and brought the vehicle with me at my own expense for shipment. At the time of my arrival in the US the vehicle had approximately 16,000 miles. The vehicle performed very well. However, as the winter season approached in WA my wife and I noticed some unexplained and very infrequent clicking noise inside the vehicle. This experience became more common – but inconsistent - over time as the humidity increased due to the more frequent light rains.

In Feb. the problem of cycling became clear as my wife and I were driving to the city and the we noticed the clicking coincided with the door locks 'unlocking themselves' then relocking automatically,,,,,, and unlocking and repeating the cycle. If the lock was manually engaged the door might stay locked for a matter of minutes but again begin the cycling and stopping in an unlocked position. On that afternoon one person stayed in the car while errands were accomplished. Upon return home I took the vehicle to the nearby military base auto hobby shop to try to identify a resolve for the problem by talking with people. No one there was able to help or could suggest a quick solution. Because it was then close to the end of the business day I called a Chrysler dealer in the next town. The maintenance manager quickly identified the concern and suggested it was likely the electric locking system switch on one or more of the 3 doors. She related the problem was manifested when the lock switch (es) became wet and then shorted the electric switch. (Looking back on our experience this sounded like a logical explanation as the problem would disappear after periods of good weather). Furthermore, the manager offered that I could safely neutralize the electric lock system by removing the appropriate fuse in the left dash board fuse panel. I could not find that fuse so I called back and was told to look on the fuse panel under the hood on the driver side. I could not locate the proper fuse there so I did not remove any fuses but rather disconnected the battery and locked the vehicle manually with a key for the night.

That weekend I attempted to find out more about the problem by checking various web sites and the large Durango manual I have. I did find information on the web that indicated at least four models produced by Chrysler / Dodge in the period 2000 – 2003 manifested

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malfunctioning lock switches. Additionally, I uncovered information about at lease one other major concern with Dodge Dakota and Dodge Durango vehicles over years 2000-2003 that related to upper ball joints which could cause dangerous and somewhat sudden steering difficulties. This information encouraged me to visit a Dealers' maintenance facility and become better informed on potential problems with the vehicle I have. So, I visited a Dodge dealer on the next work day which resulted in the following information being collected:

- I was provided with a copy of the Upper Ball Joint document. A recall was issued on vehicles with upper ball joints that were found to be faulty. Important to note is the fact that the failure of these ball joints was caused by **water / moisture leaking** into the joint which caused deteriorating and failure. COPY of recall enclosed. However the dealer told me that according to the VIN number the ball joints of my vehicle MY VEHICLE WERE NOT involved. A copy of the recall is included.
- I was provided with a copy of the Service Bulletin that describes basic information on the security / lock problem caused by faulty design / manufacture that allows moisture / water to compromise the lock operation. ***I would submit that while having the faulty ball joints is more a concern since they are involved every time a vehicle is operated having faulty lock switches are also a safety hazard when conditions are present. Keeping a vehicle secure with this problem is seriously compromised. I have locked my vehicle only to find it later automatically became unlocked by weather conditions. Security of the vehicle from theft or loss of content is an obvious concern. Lack of security driving at night or in unfamiliar areas is compromised since locks could be automatically open. Having a child in the car whose locks cannot be kept engaged is yet an additional concern. However, my biggest concern is the potential of keeping doors secure during an unexpected accident. The importance of proper functioning locks to safety of people is on par with that of ball joints.***
    - A copy of the Service bulletin for door locks is enclosed. Unfortunately, the maintenance facility at the dealer has indicated that according to policy the service bulletin is information for service but work and materials are at cost to the vehicle owner. I considered the possibility of accomplishing the work myself after purchasing the parts which costs approximately $60. To have the dealer accomplish the work I was told it would cost about $360. The service manager also related that before replacement of the lock switch it would be wise to have the actual lock operation checked. This would cost an additional $100 or so. Total cost then approaches $500. However, to check three locks will require one to 3 doors to be partially disassembled to investigate which (one, two, three door lock starters (other) are the problem. **(It would seem that the Service Bulletin and history of the problem has accurately identified the problem.)**
    - **Because of the importance of lock security on a daily basis as well as in an accident I would submit that the Service Bulletin is not the proper path of remedy to this problem. The repair should be at the expense of the manufacturer since the electrical design does not meet known and well established conditions of operation and electrical codes. Had I moved to the Sarah Desert I might not be plagued with the danger presented by the faulty lock switches but if I would visit a**

wet climate there could be concerns. Finally, a vehicle with ~20,000 original miles should be mechanically sound although out of warranty due to its manufacture of 2001 (2000, 2002 or 2003). The Service Bulletin has pointed out that the problem has not been precipitated by aged or worn parts but a design and manufacturing error.

Finally, from my research of design / manufacturing problems with my vehicle I have come across a multitude of problems with a wide variety of Chrysler and Dodge products that well outdistance the frequency of engineering and safety concerns of many vehicle manufacturers. According to some reports it appears that they might have the worse record of all vehicle manufacturers nationally and internationally. Last Friday a local Seattle TV news program related on their late news that Chrysler / Dodge had announced a series of new recalls for later (than 2003) model vehicles for a variety of problems that included fire, electrical problems and other issues. Since I caught only a short piece of the announcement I wrote to the TV news desk to ask for a copy of the coverage and / or more information. Possibly this will be made available during the regular work week starting tomorrow. These safety conditions are unacceptable to any safety efforts to maintain much less improve safety standards for vehicles and their operation on roads.

I would appreciate learning if / how the manufacturer of my Dodge Durango can be approached to take responsibility for proper corrective actions for faulty door lock switches under a recall or similar conditions. To date NO repairs have been attempted by me or by any maintenance facility as I attempt to gain a more accurate perspective of my options. My Durango has been parked with a disconnected battery for over a week since the security of locking the vehicle is non-existent in these wet weather conditions. If you have any suggestions or thoughts on what a next step on my part could incorporate to gain dealer responsibility for correction or even if you have any concerns I may address I would be most happy to promptly hear from you.

Yours truly,

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Enclosure
Service Bulletin 7/18/2003
Safety Recall D47 December 2004