



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

Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

February 7, 2008

The Honorable Patrick McHenry
Member, U.S. House of Representatives
87 Fourth Street NW, Suite A
Hickory, NC 28603

NVS-216 aac
Ref. #10206071

Dear Congressman McHenry:

Thank you for your correspondence dated September 17 on behalf of your constituent, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] wrote concerning the non-deployment of the air bag in his model year (MY) 2002 Dodge Ram truck.

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. In order for the agency to initiate an investigation, we look carefully at the body of consumer complaints and other available data to determine whether a defect may exist.

We appreciate the report you provided on behalf of your constituent. Reports from motorists are a very important source of information for us. Each report is analyzed and entered into a database that is used to help determine whether an investigation into a possible safety defect is warranted.

Vehicle air bags are supplemental restraints that add to the occupant protection provided by seat belts. The air bag systems are complex and must be designed to properly discriminate between crash and non-crash events. The systems are designed to deploy in response to events involving particular energy levels and impact angles. Furthermore, each real-world crash event is unique and does not exactly replicate the various crash test conditions that manufacturers use for designing their air bag performance. As a result, without making a detailed technical examination of each of these events, it is very difficult to make a definitive assessment on each and every report of an air bag not deploying in a crash. We carefully track reports of such events to determine whether there is any evidence of a defect trend. Where such a trend appears, we open a defect investigation.



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There are a number of factors that can affect whether an air bag will deploy in a given crash; e.g., the angle of impact, the speed of any other vehicle, and the amount of force absorbed by the other vehicle or object that is impacted. Only an expert in crash reconstruction can provide an educated opinion as to whether the air bag in a vehicle should have deployed in a specific crash. [REDACTED] may wish to request through his vehicle insurance company that an expert in crash reconstruction examine the circumstances surrounding his crash.

We have reviewed our database to identify any trend with regard to air bag non-deployment in a frontal crash for MY 2002 Dodge Ram trucks. A trend is not evident at this time. However, the information [REDACTED] provided has been entered into our database. Based on his report and any additional information we may receive on the subject, we will continue to monitor this issue and will take further action as warranted.

If you have any questions, please contact me or Mr. Ronald L. Medford, Senior Associate Administrator for Vehicle Safety at (202) 366-9700. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. R. Nason", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicole R. Nason

cc: Washington Office