



U.S. Department of Transportation

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

July 17, 2014

The Honorable Jason Smith
Member, U.S. House of Representatives
22 E. Columbia Street
Farmington, MO 63640

NVS-216 nam
Ref. No. 10577394

Dear Congressman Smith:

Thank you for your correspondence on behalf of your constituent, [REDACTED] concerning his model year (MY) 1996 Ford F-150 truck. Your letter was forwarded to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). I am pleased to respond.

NHTSA is the Federal agency responsible for improving safety on our Nation's highways. This is accomplished through a variety of programs. Our vehicle regulations set minimum performance standards of vehicle safety and we are authorized to order a recall if a vehicle does not comply with those regulations or when a safety risk is posed by a vehicle defect.

[REDACTED] indicates that he suffered injuries when the airbag deployed in his MY 1996 Ford F-150 truck. He recognized that NHTSA issued a ruling in 1997 that permitted manufacturers to reduce the force of air bags in newly manufactured vehicles. He asserts that older vehicles like his have been allowed to remain on the road with air bags that may deploy with excessive force and cause injuries.

We are very sorry to hear of the injuries that [REDACTED] sustained in his crash. At the time his truck was manufactured in 1996, the air bags were in compliance with the then current standards for occupant protection. With the advancements in air bag technology by the automotive industry, NHTSA decided to require manufacturers to comply with amendments to Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 208 that introduced advanced frontal air bags in March 1997.

Technological advancements in motor vehicle safety occur constantly; however, these advancements do not make older vehicles unsafe. Airbags remain a key component in occupant safety along with the proper use of the restraint system. The benefits of the air bags under the prior standard far outweigh the risk of not having them at all.


The Honorable Jason Smith

We received two reports from [REDACTED] on January 22, 2013, (Ref. No. 10493754, enclosed) and on April 4, 2014, (Ref. No. 10577394, enclosed) through our NHTSA Vehicle Safety Hotline. Your constituent's reports were reviewed by NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI). Under our standard procedures, ODI staff may follow up and contact the vehicle owner if we require additional information. [REDACTED] indicates that an investigator from the Department of Transportation inspected his vehicle on April 4, 2014; however, we do not have a record of that inspection.

We reviewed our database in an effort to identify whether a safety defect trend exists with regard to air bags exploding or deploying with excessive force in MY 1996 Ford F-150 trucks. At this time, there is insufficient evidence to warrant opening a safety defect investigation or initiating a recall. The information you provided has been entered into our database. It will be considered with future reports to identify any safety-related defect trends that may require our attention. We have enclosed a brochure explaining the NHTSA investigation and recall process which is also on our website at www.-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/recalls/recallprocess.cfm.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions, please contact me or Ms. Nancy L. Lewis, Associate Administrator for Enforcement at (202) 366-3217.

Sincerely yours,



Kristin J. Kingsley
Acting Director, Governmental Affairs,
Policy and Strategic Planning

Enclosures

cc: Washington Office