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Pico Rivera, CA

566048

April 6, 2002

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, CD 20590

OFFICE OF DEFECTS INVESTIGATION

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RECEIVED

Dear Administrator:

Over the past several days I have tried to reach your organization by phone. In each instance, I opted to leave a message in hopes that I would be home during your return call. Unfortunately I missed both of the return calls from your representative – instead my answering machine took a message. Thank you, nevertheless, for returning my calls. Perhaps it is better for me to address my dilemma via letter to you.

I am the original owner of 1997 Dodge Caravan, VIN 2B4GP25R4VR [REDACTED], for which the rear-seat, 3-point, shoulder-harness seatbelts (both left and right) are not functioning. The seatbelts are jammed – one cannot extend them out from the opening in the over-the-shoulder interior roof trim. To add, a thick insulation material is protruding from the seatbelt opening, and a black goeey film is on the seatbelts.

On March 30, 2002, I took the vehicle in to have serviced at Whittier Gonzalez Dodge, 16114 East Whittier Blvd., Whittier, California 90603, phone: (562) 943-7161. They performed work to rectify a manufacturer's problem with the fuel rail - recall #895. While having the recall service performed, I asked the service department to check the rear seatbelts.

Since my Dodge appears to be out of warranty, the service representative "Rudy" (Peterson?) said he would contact Chrysler to see if a courtesy repair could be made to the rear seatbelts. He said, "he has seen it go both ways – sometimes they (Chrysler) do, sometimes they don't." On Tuesday, April 2, 2002, Rudy reached me at home to say that Chrysler would not make the repair. I thanked Rudy for inquiring on my behalf. Rudy was apologetic saying that it's obvious that (the non-working seatbelts) was nothing that I did. He went on to say that it appears that adhesive/insulation from the headliner melted on to the seatbelts. Even a novice automotive person would make that same assessment just by looking at it. I was glad to hear it from him.

I am writing you, in hopes that you would assist me in getting the rear seatbelts repaired free of charge. To date, I have never needed to use the rear seat belts for the profile of my family is my wife and myself with two small children – ages 5 and 3. On a regular basis, we use the front driver and passenger seatbelts, as well as the middle bench seat's

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(built-in) child-seat harness system ("H" pattern). The child seat system is a factory option that we paid extra for.

It seems extremely dangerous and life threatening for the rear seat belts to be inoperable. This basic safety device is not a "wear item" nor is the non-operation a result of anything I did causing it to be that way. My personal opinion is the same as Rudy's, but I will be more blunt. I believe Chrysler manufacturing used inferior adhesive that loosened over time causing both the adhesive and the insulation to drop into/onto the rear seatbelt system thus gumming and jamming up the system rendering it useless. As Rudy has indicated, Chrysler has already made some repairs to cars out of warranty. I want my vehicle repaired, gratis, as well.

Although I pride myself on being a safe driver, other driver's who may strike my vehicle, or accidents beyond my control can cause serious injury or death to my rear seated passengers. I know there will be a day when I will need to carry more than my immediate family, thus requiring the use of the rear bench seat. To add, it is illegal to transport passengers in the rear seat without their use of safety belts. I purchased my Dodge Caravan because it was featured to be a seven-passenger mini-van. I should have the ability to transport seven people safely and legally in this vehicle.

Could it be that Chrysler is turning a blind eye to this safety-related problem? Perhaps your agency should investigate. Who decides what should become a recall item? I feel that the inoperable seat belts are just as prudent for a recall as the suspect fuel rail (recall #895).

Thank you for taking the time to review my request for assistance. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions. My home number is listed above, and my work number during the day is [REDACTED]. Please reply at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]