

**The Honorable Trent Lott  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510**

**Dear Senator Lott:**

Thank you for your letter dated April 4, 1995, on behalf of your constituent, concerning the rear liftgate latch problem on the 1984 through 1994 Chrysler Corporation (Chrysler) minivans. As discussed below, Chrysler is conducting a "service campaign" to replace these assemblies and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will monitor the progress of the campaign.

NHTSA is the government agency responsible for improving safety on our Nation's highways. As part of our efforts to achieve this goal, we are authorized, under Chapter 301 of Title 49 U.S.C. (formerly the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, as amended), to order manufacturers to recall and repair vehicles or items of motor vehicle equipment when our investigations indicate that they contain serious safety-related defects due to design, construction, or performance. In order for the agency to initiate a defect investigation, sufficient data must exist to warrant the expenditure of agency resources. Most of the information in our database comes from problems reported to us by consumers. Based upon the results of our investigations, we may seek a recall when such defects affect a group of vehicles or items of motor vehicle equipment and these defects represent an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety.

The agency takes its responsibility to conduct thorough and complete safety defect investigations very seriously. NHTSA has been conducting an investigation of 1984 through 1994 Dodge Caravan, Plymouth Voyager, and Chrysler Town and Country vehicles for alleged rear liftgate failure. Chrysler recently initiated a "service campaign" to replace the rear liftgate latch assemblies on these vehicles. Owners of these vehicles will be notified of the rear liftgate latch replacement program and receive, free of charge, a stronger latch as soon as parts become available. NHTSA's investigation will remain open to monitor the progress of the campaign, assess the performance of the replacement latch, and to determine if any further agency action is necessary.

The agency does agree with \_\_\_\_\_ that everyone in the vehicle should be buckled up, even in the back seat. However, with respect to \_\_\_\_\_ comment that belted occupants will not be ejected in the event that the doors do open, the agency has received reports that because safety belts in these vehicles are not anchored to the floor, in a crash belted occupants, along with the seats, have been ejected through the opened liftgate.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me or Mr. William A. Boehly, Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance, on (202) 366-9700.

Sincerely,

Carol Stroebel  
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs

Enclosure:  
Constituent's Correspondence

DEC - 4 1995

**CERTIFIED MAIL**  
**RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

Dale E. Dawkins, Director  
Vehicle Compliance and Safety Affairs  
Chrysler Corporation - CIMS 482-00-91  
800 Chrysler Drive  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326-2757

NSA-111jdw  
95I-001

Dear Mr. Dawkins:

As you know, Chrysler's campaign to replace the liftgate latch in 1984 through 1995 model minivans as described in your letters of March 27 and April 27, 1995, will be monitored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) as a remedial campaign to improve the safety performance of those vehicles. As such, NHTSA has assigned an internal identification code, 95I-001, to the campaign.

We are requesting certain additional information regarding this product safety improvement campaign. Pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166 and 30165, please provide numbered responses to the following questions. Please repeat the applicable item verbatim above each response. The submitted information to include, but not be limited to, all written reports or documents; transcriptions, notes, or other documentation of oral communications; and information transmitted or contained on electronic storage media.

1. Mr. Lewis H. Goldfarb, Assistant General Counsel for Chrysler, by letter dated October 18, 1995, described several actions that Chrysler intended to take to assure an appropriate response rate in this campaign. Among other things, Chrysler stated that it planned to send a follow-up notification letter to all owners who did not respond to the original notification. Please state the time frame when such letters will be sent (i.e., how long after the original notification is sent) and provide a draft to the undersigned prior to mailing the letter to owners.
2. In the October 18 letter, Chrysler also stated that it would send a letter to all owners within 30 days of the closing of NHTSA's investigation outlining the status of the campaign and encouraging owners to obtain the replacement latch when they are advised that parts are available. We note that the letter was not sent by Chrysler. You have advised the agency that Chrysler now believes that such a letter would not be beneficial. You have requested that, in lieu of such a letter, NHTSA agree that Chrysler may take additional actions beyond those described in the October 18 letter. Please describe in detail the actions that Chrysler wishes to substitute for this letter immediately.

3. In the October 18, 1995, letter, reference is made to dealer instructions. Please furnish a copy of all of Chrysler's communications to dealers describing or pertaining this campaign. This includes instructions or communications of any type or medium including the "videotaped announcement from Chrysler's top management," and the "special education materials updating [dealers] on the owner service action and providing answers to owner questions," referenced in that letter.
4. Furnish a copy of all other notifications, bulletins (including service, warranty, "special policy," etc.), engineering service letters, and similar communications that have been issued, or will be issued, by Chrysler pertaining to this campaign that were not submitted to this office previously.
5. You previously advised NHTSA that minivan owners will be notified of the availability of replacement latches in eight phases. The first three of these phases have been completed, and the fourth (which began on October 30, 1995) is continuing. The remaining four phases, which apply to vehicles equipped with a remote release mechanism, are to begin on December 18, 1995; April 1, 1996; May 27, 1996; and June 10, 1996, respectively. If there are any significant changes in this schedule, Chrysler must notify the agency promptly.
6. We request that Chrysler notify NHTSA of any incidents in which a replacement liftgate latch opens in a crash within 7 days of becoming aware of the incident. Chrysler must also include its views as to the circumstances and cause of the latch opening.

Please provide this information, referencing the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration identification code 951-001 to this office by December 11, 1995.

#### **RECALL STATUS REPORTS**

To assist the agency in monitoring the performance of this campaign, please provide the following information in Chrysler's periodic status reports:

- a. the number of notification letters mailed out;
- b. the number of letters returned undeliverable;
- c. the number of vehicles remedied;
- d. the number of vehicles scrapped or destroyed; and
- e. the number of vehicles whose owners were otherwise determined to be unreachable.

These status reports must be provided at the conclusion of each calendar quarter in which notification to owners to take their vehicles in for replacement of the liftgate latch began, and each consecutive quarter thereafter for 6 quarters following the quarter in which notification was completed. Please provide this information according to the model year, latch type, and Chrysler's owner notification phase. The first status report for this campaign is due on January 30, 1996.

If you have any questions on this matter, please contact Mr. Jon White at (202) 366-5227 or by Fax at (202) 366-7882.

Sincerely,

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Kathleen C. DeMeter, Director  
Office of Defects Investigation  
Safety Assurance

OCT 18 1996

**CERTIFIED MAIL**  
**RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

Dale E. Dawkins, Director  
Vehicle Compliance and Safety Affairs  
Chrysler Corporation - CIMS 482-00-91  
800 Chrysler Drive  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326-2757

NSA-11jdw  
95I-001

Dear Mr. Dawkins:

This letter is to acknowledge receipt of Chrysler's 1984-1995 model minivan liftgate latch replacement safety improvement campaign, 95I-001 (Chrysler's No. 640), Quarterly Report for the calendar quarter ending September 30, 1996.

The replacement rates attained already to-date for the newer model vehicles are commendable. However, we remain concerned about the replacement rates of the older minivans, with either the manual or power release latches. Our concerns about these rates are heightened because more than a third of the registered minivans involved in the latch replacement action are older vehicles. I appreciate the offer to meet with you to discuss what future plans or actions Chrysler intends to take to improve the replacement rate of these vehicles. Please contact Ms. Kathleen DeMeter, Director of the Office of Defects Investigation, at (202) 366-2850, to arrange for our joint meeting.

Sincerely,

Original signed by  
Michael B. Brownlee

Michael B. Brownlee  
Associate Administrator  
for Safety Assurance