

**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