

Ford Motor Company

L. W. Camp, Director
Automotive Safety Office
Environmental and Safety Engineering

October 20, 2000

Mr. Kenneth N. Weinstein
Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

Pursuant to Part 573 of Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Defect and Noncompliance Reports, Ford Motor Company submits the following information concerning a safety-related recall action that it is initiating.

573.5 (c) (2)

Certain 2001 model year Mercury Villager vehicles built at the Ohio Assembly Plant from September 25, 2000 through October 11, 2000.

Because these vehicles are not produced in VIN order, information as to the applicability of this action to specific vehicles can best be obtained by either calling Ford's toll-free line (1-800-392-3673) or contacting a local Ford or Lincoln/Mercury dealer, who can obtain specific information regarding the vehicles from the Ford QASIS computer system.

The safety belt buckle assemblies mentioned later in this letter were supplied to Ford by Autoliv America, 1320 Pacific Drive, Auburn Hills, Michigan, 48326. Autoliv's phone number is (801) 829-9200.

573.5 (c) (3)

Approximately 2,500 vehicles.

573.5 (c) (4)

Approximately 30 percent.

573.5 (c) (5)

The subject vehicles may have the plastic trim cover around the base of the front seat safety belt buckle trapped between the shoulder of the restraint anchorage bolt and the seat pedestal. If this occurs, the restraint buckle anchorage may not have the intended clamp



load. Without the intended clamp load, the performance of the safety belt is unknown, and could potentially result in less than the intended level of occupant restraint during a vehicle crash

573.5 (c) (8)

Ford first became aware of this condition during a routine torque surveillance audit at the assembly plant conducted on October 10, 2000. Further investigation determined that the buckle, anti-rotation bracket, and the buckle trim cover may not have been properly aligned or retained on the shoulder of the anchor bolt by the star washer that keeps the individual components in their design positions until the buckle assembly is installed in a vehicle. If the components are not properly aligned, the plastic trim cover may become trapped between the shoulder of the anchor bolt and the seat pedestal during installation. If the trim cover is trapped, the plastic will creep and result in a loss of clamp load in the joint, which could eventually allow the anchor bolt to loosen. In an abundance of caution, Ford has decided not to take the time to evaluate this condition, and to immediately conduct a safety recall program. To date, Ford is not aware of any reports of this condition. However, a review of vehicles at the assembly plant located 58 vehicles with the trim cover trapped under the bolt shoulder.

573.5 (c) (8)

Ford will notify owners of record of the affected vehicles to return them to dealers for inspection and, as necessary, retorquing of the anchor bolt and/or replacement of the safety belt buckle. It is currently anticipated that owner notification will occur on or before the week of November 20, 2000.

573.5 (c) (9)

Ford does not plan to make a public statement concerning this action. A copy of notification letters to dealers and owners from Ford Customer Service Division will be forwarded when available.

573.5 (c) (11)

Ford has assigned campaign number 00S36 to this action.

Sincerely,



L. W. Camp