

Ford Motor Company

Automotive Safety Office
Environmental and Safety Engineering

August 4, 2003

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

03V-281 ① of ③

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

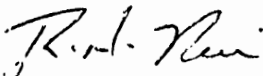
Subject: Ford Recall No. 03S04 – Certain 1998 to 2001 Model Year Ford Explorer / Mercury Mountaineer 4-door and 1998 to 2000 Ford Explorer 2-door, and 2001 to 2002 Model Year Ford Explorer Sport and Sport Trac vehicles equipped with high back seats.

Summary

- Ford Action – Ford is conducting a voluntary safety recall involving certain 1998 to 2001 model year Explorer / Mountaineer 4-door, 1998 to 2000 Explorer 2-door, and 2001 to 2002 model year Explorer Sport and Sport Trac vehicles equipped with high back seats to replace the bolt that attaches the seat recliner mechanism to the seat back frame on the drive side seat.
- Number of Vehicles Involved – Approximately 1,682,844 vehicles (1,552,880 in the United States and Federalized Territories, 69,795 in Canada and 60,169 in other countries.)
- Affect on Vehicle Operation – In a vast majority of instances, operators of vehicles with a fractured bolt between the upper recliner attachment and the seat back frame have returned the vehicles to the dealership for repair after noticing 'looseness' or 'noise' in the seat. This condition occurs when the bolt fractures and jams within the seat back frame. If the bolt fractures and does not jam in the seat back frame, the seat back may recline until it makes contact with an object behind the seat, such as the 2nd row seat cushion. The occupant could potentially lose contact with the steering wheel or foot pedals during such an event.
- Service Procedure – Owners will be instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the driver seat upper bolt that attaches the seat recliner mechanism to the seat back frame replaced with a metal spacer and bolt. In addition, seats with tubular back frames will have the fully threaded lower recliner bolt replaced with a partially threaded bolt.

Attached is the detailed information required by the applicable portions of 49 CFR Part 573 – Defect and Non-Compliance Information Report.

Sincerely,


James P. Vondale

kjg/tab

330 Town Center Drive, Dearborn, Michigan 48126-2738 USA



49 CFR Part 573 -- DEFECT INFORMATION REPORT
03S04 - 1998-- 2001 MODEL YEAR EXPLORER/MOUNTAINEER 4-DOOR,
1998 -- 2000 EXPLORER 2-DOOR, AND 2001-2002 EXPLORER SPORT AND SPORT TRAC
DRIVER HIGH BACK BUCKET SEAT
RECLINER TO SEAT BACK FRAME ATTACHMENT BOLT

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

573.6 (c) (2) -- Potentially Affected Vehicles

The vehicles affected are the 1998 to 2001 Explorer/Mountaineer 4-door built between May 13, 1997 to December 24, 2000 at the St. Louis Assembly Plant and April 25, 1997 to September 27, 2000 at the Louisville Assembly Plant, 1998 to 2000 Explorer 2-door built between May 13, 1997 through August 10, 2000 at the St. Louis Assembly Plant and April 25, 1997 through July 26, 2000 at the Louisville Assembly Plant, and the 2001 to 2002 Explorer Sport and Sport Trac built between September 24, 1999 to August 16, 2002 at the Louisville Assembly Plant.

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 by contacting a local Ford dealer who can obtain specific information regarding the vehicles from the Ford On-line Automotive Service Information System (OASIS) database.

573.6 (c) (3) -- Estimated Population of Vehicles Potentially Affected

Approximately 1,682,844 vehicles; (1,552,880 in the United States and Federalized Territories, 69,795 in Canada and 60,169 in other countries.)

573.6 (c) (4) -- Estimated Percentage of Affected Vehicles with the Condition

Unknown.

573.6 (c) (5) -- Description of Defect

The upper bolt on the driver's side high back seat that attaches the seat recliner mechanism to the seat back frame has the potential to fracture. Operators of vehicles with a fractured bolt between the upper recliner attachment and the seat back frame have returned the vehicles to dealerships for repair after noticing 'looseness' or 'noise' in the seat. This condition occurs when the bolt fractures and jams within the seat back frame. If the bolt fractures and does not jam in the seat back frame, the seat back may recline until it makes contact with an object behind the seat, such as the 2nd row seat cushion. The occupant could potentially lose contact with the steering wheel or foot pedals during such an event.

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573.6 (c) (6) – Chronology of Events

On December 12, 2002 the Critical Concern Review Group in Ford was notified of reports of the driver seat back being loose, rattling or reclining unexpectedly on 2000 model year Explorers. A warranty data search was conducted by the Enhanced Concern Identification (ECI) group and provided to engineering to review and analyze. Based on the engineering analysis of the data, additional field data was reviewed to determine if a defect trend existed. Engineering conducted a series of analyses including inspection of seats of various design levels from different model years and models, a review of vehicle design changes, investigation into the material quality of the attachment bolts, and cycle testing of seats. Ford has identified approximately 1,269 reports of alleged seat back bolt fracture.

573.6 (c) (8) Service Program

Owners will be instructed to take their vehicles to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have the driver side seat upper bolt that attaches the seat recliner mechanism to the seat back frame replaced with a metal spacer and bolt. In addition, seats with tubular back frames will have the fully threaded lower recliner bolt replaced with a partially threaded bolt.

There will be no charge to owners for this service. Mailing of owner notification letters will begin August 29, 2003 and be completed August 29, 2003. Ford's general reimbursement plan for the cost of remedies paid for by vehicle owners prior to notification of a safety recall was provided to the agency on February 28, 2003.

573.6 (c) (9) -- Press statement and Dealer/Owner Letters

Ford will make a public statement concerning the subject matter of this action. A copy of the Notification letters to dealers and owners from Ford will be forwarded when available.

573.6 (c) (11) -- Recall Number

Ford has assigned recall number 03S04 to this action.

573.13 (c) (2) - Ending Date for Reimbursement Eligibility

The ending date for reimbursement eligibility for cost of remedies paid for by vehicle owners per Ford's general reimbursement plan is September 8, 2003.