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U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SEP 28 1995

Mr. Dale Dawkins
Director, Vehicle Compliance and Safety Affairs
Chrysler Technology Center
800 Chrysler Drive (CIMS 482-00-01)
Auburn Hills, MI 48326-2757

Dear Mr. Dawkins:

As I indicated in my letter to you dated September 25, 1995, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) was very concerned by a recent national television report which showed Chrysler's minivan hotline operators minimizing the safety implications of Chrysler's latch replacement campaign in the course of various phone calls with minivan owners.

Since sending that letter, NHTSA has obtained a copy of the question and answer script which the minivan hotline operators have been using to respond to owner inquiries. In a phone conversation on September 27, you confirmed that the script was being used by the operators.

NHTSA is very troubled by the tone and substance of the script. Like the operators shown on the television report, the script attempts to minimize, if not deny outright, the safety concerns which prompted NHTSA to open its investigation into the minivan latches. To resolve these concerns, NHTSA insisted on Chrysler's agreement to provide stronger, safer latches at no charge to all minivan owners.

Indeed, the script leads minivan owners to incorrectly believe that NHTSA found the minivan latches to contain no defect. For example, at one point, the script states that NHTSA has "made no finding of defect;" a few lines later, the script states, "there is no defect with the current latch." Perhaps most disturbingly, the script states that "[a]fter careful review and extensive cooperation with NHTSA it is clear that there is no problem with the minivan latch and no safety defect."

As Chrysler is well aware, NHTSA at no time made any finding that the minivan latches contain no defect. Rather, shortly before the point in the investigation when NHTSA would have decided whether a safety defect exists, Chrysler offered to conduct a latch replacement campaign which will provide minivan owners with a stronger, safer latch at no charge. NHTSA accepted the offer because it promised to provide minivan owners with all the safety benefits of a formal recall campaign at the earliest possible date. Under the circumstances, it was no longer necessary for NHTSA to decide whether to make a formal defect finding. NHTSA did not do so. NHTSA at no time found the latches to be safe.



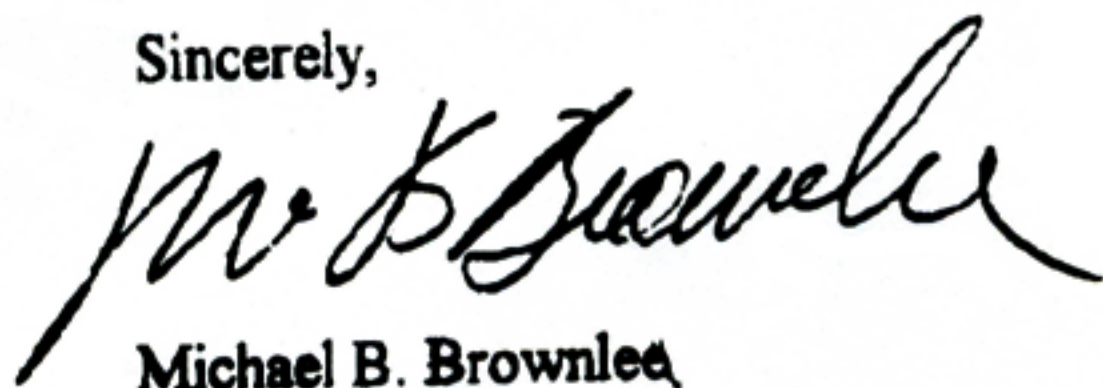
ALTO SAFETY HOTLINE
(800) 424-9393
Wash. D.C. Area 366-0123

NHTSA's concerns with the hotline script are not simply academic. Indeed, while it disturbs us that our position in this investigation would be distorted, we are much more disturbed by the prospect that numerous minivan owners are being led into a false sense of security about the safety of their minivan latches. This could lead them to be less concerned with buckling up and less prone to have their latches replaced.

In our most recent conversation concerning this matter, you stated that, in response to NHTSA's concerns, Chrysler would take immediate action to revise the script to eliminate the misleading portions. We look forward to working with you to assure that the revisions do not mislead the public.

In the meantime, Chrysler should communicate in the near future with its minivan owners to inform them of the replacement schedule, to clearly convey the safety concerns which underlie NHTSA's investigation, and to encourage them to have the repairs made promptly upon being notified that parts are available.

Sincerely,



Michael B. Brownlee
Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance