

DAIMLERCHRYSLER

DaimlerChrysler Corporation

Matthew C. Reynolds

Director

Vehicle Compliance & Safety Affairs

February 7, 2001

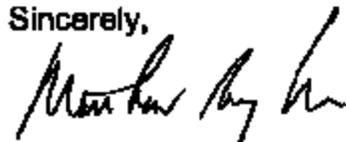
Mr. Kenneth N. Weinstein
Associate Administrator, Safety Assurance
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

01V-040 (01)

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

Attached is DaimlerChrysler Corporation's Defect Information Report regarding some 1994-1999 model year Dodge Ram Pickups. Due to corrosion of the return spring, the hood secondary latch may become inoperative, possibly allowing the hood to open unexpectedly if the primary latch mechanism is not engaged. DaimlerChrysler will conduct a safety recall covering the defined "salt belt" states to correct this condition.

Sincerely,



Matthew C Reynolds

Enclosure: Defect Information Report for DaimlerChrysler Recall # 973

cc: K.C. DeMeter, NHTSA
Division of Occupational Safety & Health
California Department of Industrial Relations

DEFECT INFORMATION REPORT FOR DAIMLERCHRYSLER RECALL # 973

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OIV-040 (2)

Submission date: February 7, 2001

Identifying classification of vehicles potentially affected:

| <u>Make</u> | <u>Model</u> | <u>Model Year</u> | <u>Inclusive Dates of Manufacture</u> | <u>Volume</u> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Dodge | Ram Pickup | 1994-1999 | 7/23/93 to 3/22/99 | 701,000 (est.) |

Estimated percentage containing defect: Unknown

Description of defect:

Corrosion of the return spring on the hood secondary latch may cause the mechanism to bind in the "release position". If the primary latch is not engaged, the hood could open unexpectedly.

The following chronology of principal events led to the determination of a safety related defect:

The following principal events occurred in the period from May 2000 through late January 2001:

- NHTSA opened inquiry RQ00-012 on May 3, 2000, to investigate the effectiveness of prior recall #638, which involved the replacement of the secondary hood latch guide bracket. NHTSA had received 21 reports of inoperative hood secondary latches either occurring after the recall remedy had been performed, or occurring on vehicles outside of the original recall population.
- In response to RQ00-012, DaimlerChrysler initiated an investigation to determine if there were issues with the original recall and to assess if there was an independent issue which may be causing the condition. DaimlerChrysler submitted information to NHTSA and continued its investigation in cooperation with NHTSA.
- The investigation revealed 345 complaints for the 1994-1997 model years claiming that the hood secondary latch did not function properly. Of the 345 complaints, 159 occurred after the original recall work was completed, and 158 occurred on vehicles outside of the recall population. The remainder of complaints involved vehicles in which the recall had not been performed.
- Due to the large number of complaints after and outside of the recall population,

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DaimlerChrysler initiated an engineering survey of the entire hood latching system. NHTSA was aware of DaimlerChrysler's intent to conduct the survey. The survey of 39 employee and company owned vehicles was completed during January of 2001. Secondary hood latch components were removed from the vehicles and inspected. The results of the survey indicated that corrosion of the hood secondary latch return spring was the probable cause of the latch malfunctions.

- The investigation also revealed that the latch spring material was changed from carbon steel to stainless steel in March of 1999. This action was a result of a corporate initiative to upgrade corrosion protection on some body hardware components. Further analysis of owner complaints confirmed that there were no reported incidents of hood secondary latch malfunction after the stainless steel spring implementation.
- The issue was presented to the Vehicle Regulations Committee which decided that a safety recall was necessary to correct vehicles that were built with hood secondary latches that could corrode and potentially malfunction.
- The Vehicle Regulations Committee also approved sending an interim notification to owners informing them of the corrosion concern and asking them to ensure that the primary latch is engaged. When the primary latch is engaged, the secondary latch will not fail. The letter will further instruct owners on how to lubricate the secondary latch to counter the effects of any corrosion.

Statement of measures to be taken to correct the defect:

DaimlerChrysler will conduct a recall campaign to notify the owners of vehicles in the salt belt states of the possibility of a hood secondary latch malfunction and to replace the latch on affected vehicles. DaimlerChrysler will institute the recall consistent with NHTSA's published list of states within the salt belt (per the NHTSA's definition dated September 4, 1998: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Missouri). Implementation of the recall will require substantial retooling and associated engineering. DaimlerChrysler will inform NHTSA of the estimated implementation date in the future.

In the interim, DaimlerChrysler will send a notification to owners informing them of the corrosion concern and ask them to ensure that the primary latch is always engaged. We will also instruct them on how to lubricate the secondary latch to counter the effects of any corrosion. DaimlerChrysler currently plans to send this interim notification in March 2001.

DaimlerChrysler Corporation has a longstanding policy and practice of reimbursing owners who have incurred the cost of repairing a problem that subsequently becomes the subject

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of a field action. As part of the owner letter, DaimlerChrysler will request that customers send original receipt and/or other adequate proof of payment to the company for confirmation of the expense.