

CENTER FOR AUTO SAFETY

1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 330 Washington, DC 20009-1160 (202) 328-7700

September 10, 2003

Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
400 7th Street SW
Washington DC 20590

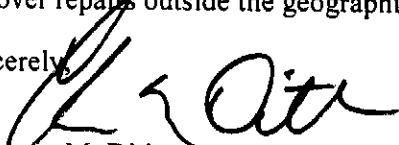
Dear Dr. Runge:

The Center for Auto Safety (CAS) has created a public complaint file on our web site at www.autosafety.org/fileacomplaint.php where consumers can file complaints on their motor vehicles. After reviewing the complaints for completeness and the matching of the make and model with the VINs, CAS now publishes the complaints within 48 hours of receiving them so that consumers can check for similar problems and organize to resolve their complaints. The CAS public data base is searchable by make, model, year and component. Unlike NHTSA's user unfriendly data base, a user can search for all models and/or model years in one search rather than having to do multiple searches for each model and year combination. The CAS data base can even be searched for specific component failures in every vehicle in the data base or even in every make or model. Thus a consumer who is interested in whether Toyota or Honda have airbag problems can search for all Honda or Toyota airbag complaints regardless of model.

Enclosed are paper copies of 1201 complaints filed on our website. Note that many of these complaints contain reports of deaths, injuries and crashes. Others relate to NHTSA recalls and investigations. For example, the complaint from Janet Britton relates to the death of her son and serious injury of two others in a 2002 Pontiac Sunfire crash. James Gibson from Tennessee complains about the defective fuel tank in his 1995 Ford Windstar not being covered by Ford's geographic recall. Larry Parker of Eden NC reports W/S wiper failure on a 1998 Chevrolet Malibu due to the very heavy snows that hit North Carolina this year but: "Chevy Dealers refuse to help repair as a recall, because the recall is limited to geographic regions, and closest state is our nearby neighbor West Virginia (where, of course, our NC residents naturally travel regularly during the winter for the sport of winter skiing)." There are numerous complaints on torsion bar and other suspension failures on 1995-98 GMC Safari's. Ricky Billings of Clinton NC reports W/S wiper failure on his 1998 Chevrolet Suburban similar to that of the 1997 Suburbans which were recalled. Many other GM report similar W/S wiper failures not covered by the earlier recall. James Herlocher of Petoskey MI reports a power brake & steering loss on a 2002 Chevrolet Silverado which dealers report is a chronic problem. Kellie Williams of Tualatin OR reports her son suffered severe eye injury from airbag deployment in a 1997 Ford Aspire.

These are but a handful of the many serious complaints in our Web complaints. We urge the agency to review these complaints and take action where appropriate. For example, the agency supposedly requires manufacturers to cover repairs outside the geographic recall states. Why wasn't this done for the cases above?

Sincerely,



Clarence M. Ditlow
Executive Director

CENTER FOR AUTO SAFETY

1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 330 Washington, DC 20009-1160 (202) 328-7700

October 8, 2003

Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
400 7th Street SW
Washington DC 20590

Dear Dr. Runge:

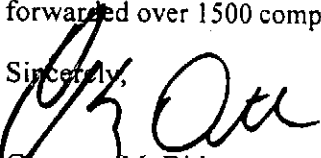
Per our previous letter of September 10, 2003 to you, enclosed please find 308 more complaints from the public complaint file on the Center for Auto Safety's web site at www.autosafety.org/fileacomplaint.php. These are new or supplemented complaints received from September 10 through October 7, 2003.

Some of the more noteworthy complaints which require quick evaluation by NHTSA include:

- James Smith – chronic head light lenses falling out on 1998 Cadillacs.
- Shawn Stover – sliding door fell off tracks & amputated big toe of 10-year old opening door of a 2001 Chevrolet Venture.
- Thomas Williams – electronic control module corrodes on 1996-2002 GM G-vans (Express & Savana) with GM issuing a TSB to repair by adding a water deflector.
- Danetta Siggers – inadvertent deployment of passenger airbag one day followed by driver airbag the next day on a 2002 Chevrolet Venture.
- Jason Vint – 1995 Ford Escort with leaking plastic gas tank not covered by geographic recall 97V144.
- Laurine Pickering & Kyle Newmeyer – both with ignition key cylinder failures on 2000 Ford Focus.
- Margaret Owen-Joiner – 1997 Ford Escort fire after airbag sensor recalled to prevent such a fire.
- Scott Emfinger – steering “broke” on 1999 Olds Intrique which went into a ditch with mother & children.
- Alan Grider – lug bolts broke on right front wheel which came off a 2001 Olds Alero.
- James Barry – door blown open by wind gust & bent door post on 2002 Olds Bravada.
- Donald Barber – wiper arm rubbed hole in brake line with brake failure and crash in 1997 Olds Silhouette.
- Albert Keller – jack buckled on 1999 Olds Aurora while raising vehicle.
- Randy Leaphart – plastic headlight assembly clouds up & had to be replaced on 1998 Plymouth Voyager.
- Richard Kasch – inadvertent deployment of just driver airbag with injury on 1997 Pontiac Grand Am.
- Ernest Murphy – steering wheel pin fell out & wheel almost came off on 1997 Pontiac Grand Am.
- Tammy Stiles – 3rd row seats came out of anchors in rear impact from Escort in 1998 Pontiac Trans Port.
- Mark McCormick – automatic park system locks up on 1995 Itasca motor home while in motion.

These are but a handful of the many serious complaints in our Web complaints. We urge the agency to review these complaints and take action where appropriate. We also ask the agency to include these complaints in its website database and to make all information public as it did from 1970 to 1995 when CAS provided about one-third of the agency's complaints. We look forward to a response to this letter and earlier letter which together forwarded over 1500 complaints indicating what action the agency will take on the issues raised.

Sincerely,


Clarence M. Ditlow
Executive Director



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

Administrator

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

NOV 3 2003

Mr. Clarence M. Ditlow
Executive Director
Center for Auto Safety
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 330
Washington, DC 20009-1160

NVS-216 mjj
Ref. # 10039883

Dear Mr. Ditlow:

This responds to your letter of September 10, 2003, informing the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the Center for Auto Safety's (CAS) "public complaint file." We appreciate receiving information about the availability of this file. NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) is receptive to all third party data that may be used to consider whether to open a safety defect investigation or support an ongoing investigation. ODI staff will be made aware that this resource is available for their use in all future investigative activities and will routinely check it.

With respect to the question in the third paragraph of your letter regarding regional recalls, I have asked ODI to look into the incidents you have identified to see if any further action is appropriate.

Thank you again for advising us of the availability of your database. While we will review the CAS database as part of our assessment of potential safety defects, we urge you to provide ODI with information any time you believe that a potential safety defect exists.

If you have any questions, please contact me or Mr. Ronald L. Medford, Senior Associate Administrator for Vehicle Safety, at (202) 366-1810.

Sincerely yours,

Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D.

*I really appreciate your making this available, as well
as working with us on our issues.*

CENTER FOR AUTO SAFETY

1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 330 Washington, DC 20009-1160 (202) 328-7700

November 6, 2003

Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
400 7th Street SW
Washington DC 20590

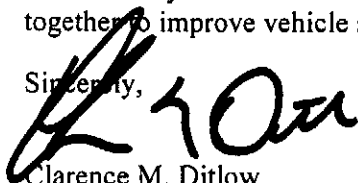
Dear Dr. Runge:

Thank you for your November 3 letter responding to my letter of September 10, 2003 forwarding 1,201 consumer complaints from the Center for Auto Safety's web site at www.autosafety.org/fileacomplaint.php.

We forwarded these letters to NHTSA for inclusion in the agency's complaint database. It is important that the agency do this for many reasons. *First*, NHTSA has long published the complaints it receives so that consumers can learn what problems other consumers are having in order to help resolve their own complaints. *Second*, NHTSA provides the complaints to the auto companies so that they can resolve the complaints and make improvements in their vehicles as former NHTSA Administrator Ricardo Martinez recognized in his correspondence with Ralph Nader on the subject of what the agency does with its complaints. *Third*, NHTSA has internal tools for searching its database to find defects that lead to recalls. Unless CAS' complaints are included in NHTSA's complaint database, the agency will not be able to use its tools to find defects which is part of NHTSA's Congressionally mandated mission. An example of such a tool is NHTSA's ability to pinpoint defects through the vehicle identification number (VIN) which reveals important information on restraint systems, engine type, vehicle weight, plant of manufacture as well as other vehicle attributes which can help determine the scope of a defect and recall. Although CAS has made great effort to include VINs in its database, our database cannot be searched by VIN or VIN component. *Fourth*, CAS has screened the complaints it sent to NHTSA to eliminate those which are clearly non-safety and outside the scope of the agency's jurisdiction. The previous CAS written complaint database contained hundreds of thousands of complaints. CAS expects our web complaint database to outstrip the written database in the future. It would be a waste of NHTSA's limited resources to do repeat manual searches of our entire database to weed out the non-safety complaints when it could readily include the safety complaints in its own database when CAS sends complaints to the agency. *Fifth*, NHTSA so recognized and used CAS' previous written complaint database in its defect mission for 25 years that it integrated the complaints into its electronic database and assigned them a unique source code. CAS' complaints have been recognized on numerous occasions in the past as being instrumental in defect investigations and recalls.

The agency's defect and recall system has been criticized by Congress in its hearings on the Ford Explorer & Firestone ATX/Wilderness tire and by the DOT Inspector General in "Review of the Office of Defects Investigation," Jan. 3, 2002. The IG criticized NHTSA for many things including an inadequate and inaccurate database as well as failing to "receive or solicit information from other sources, such as safety groups. . ." By this letter, CAS asks whether the agency will receive and integrate our web complaints into its consumer database as it did for 25 years with our written complaints; and if not, why not? We look forward to your response as we work together to improve vehicle safety in this country.

Sincerely,



Clarence M. Ditlow
Executive Director

cc: Senator John McCain
Representative Billy Tauzin
Inspector General Kenneth Mead



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

Administrator

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

DEC 2 2003

Mr. Clarence M. Ditlow
Executive Director
Center for Auto Safety
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 330
Washington, DC 20009-1160

NVS-216 mec
Ref. #10046566

Dear Mr. Ditlow:

Thank you for your letter dated November 6, 2003, requesting the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to include consumer complaints contained in a Center for Auto Safety (CAS) database in the agency's consumer complaint database.

As you have been advised by Ms. Kathleen C. DeMeter, Director of NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI), ODI is working with a CAS contractor to develop the most efficient method of incorporating the CAS complaints into the ODI complaint database. We hope to be able to accomplish this in the near future.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. DeMeter at (202) 366-2850.

Sincerely yours,

Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D.