

PERRY & HAAS, L.L.P.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

2300 Frost Bank Plaza, P.O. Box 1500, Corpus Christi, Texas 78403-1500
Telephone: 361/880-7500 Facsimile: 361/887-9507
Direct Dial: 361/880-7515
Email: davidperry@perryhaas.com

November 14, 2002

VIA FEDERAL EXPRESS

Ernesto Gomez, Ph.D.
EL CENTRO DEL BARRIO
6315 South Zarzamora
San Antonio, TX 78211

Re: Ford 15 Passenger Vans

Dear Dr. Gomez:

It has recently come to our attention that Ford Motor Company has donated two E350 15-passenger vans to two health clinics in San Antonio that serve primarily low income Hispanic families. Although the importance of providing transportation to low income families is a vital aspect of health care in this country, we think it is likewise extremely important that the transportation provided be safe transportation.

In the past two years, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA] has issued two consumer alerts warning of the dangers of rollover crashes associated with these vans, especially when loaded with 10 or more passengers. Several insurance companies have issued similar warnings, and at least one insurance company will no longer insure the vans.

15-passenger vans evolved from cargo vans in the early 1970's and have been marketed as a safe mode of transportation by Ford, General Motors and Chrysler for students, church groups, athletic teams and by health care organizations like yours. As has been recently pointed out by, among others, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA], 15-passenger vans are particularly susceptible to deadly rollover crashes when loaded with as few as five [5] passengers. When fully loaded, the vehicles become even worse. Moreover, despite the hazards associated with the lack of rollover resistance in the vehicles, automakers are not legally required to honor many basic safety protections that would protect passengers when a crash does occur, including crucial safeguards that apply to other passenger-carrying vehicles, such as school bus-type vehicles and multi-purpose passenger vehicles.

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The purpose of our letter is two-fold. First, we are enclosing a package of information for you to review and consider in the context of Ford's donation of the vans. Secondly, and more importantly, we are willing to donate the funds necessary to modify the vans that you have been given so that they are equipped with dual rear wheels. Based on independent testing by three different organizations on the Ford, GM, and Dodge versions of the vans, 15-passenger vans equipped with dual rear wheels have shown drastic improvements in traction, handling and stability. Although the addition of dual rear wheels will not absolutely prevent rollovers of these vehicles, our research has shown that the addition of dual rear wheels definitely improves the vehicle's rollover resistance thus making the vehicle safer.

The following is a photograph of an E350 15-passenger van equipped with dual rear wheels.



The package of information that we have provided with this letter includes the following:

- NHTSA's Consumer Advisory about safety issues involving 15-passenger vans;

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- NHTSA's Research Report about rollover issues associated with the vans;
- Several news clippings about rollover accidents involving the vehicles; and
- A research report and press release published by *Public Citizen* on 15-passenger vans and the dual rear wheel modification.

Although we applaud Ford's efforts to help low income Hispanic families in San Antonio and in the Rio Grande Valley, our concern is not only for the health of the families, but also their safety. As a demonstration of our commitment to consumer safety, we are putting our money where our mouth is and are willing to donate the cost of these modifications at no cost to you.

After you have had a chance to review the enclosed information, please contact us with questions or to make arrangements for the necessary financial assistance to get the vans modified.

Thank you.

s/ _____
David Perry

s/ _____
Tab Turner