



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

October 25, 2007

Ms. Miriam Pepper
Vice President, Editorial Page
The Kansas City Star
1729 Grand Boulevard
Kansas City, MO 64108

Dear Ms. Pepper,

I was disappointed to see that the Kansas City Star ignored warnings by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's experts that the underlying premise of its recent airbag story was fundamentally flawed. We agree that NHTSA maintains one of the most comprehensive fatality databases in the world. Every year, we use nationwide, police-reported data to chronicle over 40,000 crash-related highway fatalities. By our estimates, air bags saved nearly 3,000 lives last year alone and since 1988, air bags have saved an estimated 22,500 lives.

Unfortunately, our database can't be used to determine if or when an airbag should activate in a particular crash. Airbag activations are triggered by the sensing of rapid deceleration and not by the vehicle's speed at the time of the crash. That information is not typically collected by law enforcement on crash reports and thus cannot be captured in our database. It is statistically impossible to draw the kinds of conclusions that the Star did in its recent story.

Air bags have proved to be effective in saving lives and reducing serious crash injuries. Last year more than 1.1 million airbags nationwide deployed to save lives and prevent debilitating injuries. This Agency takes very seriously our mandate to investigate defects and initiate recalls when there are serious safety and compliance concerns and we continue to monitor safety devices like airbags carefully.

Sincerely,



Nicole R. Nason

