



NHTSA Report on the use of seat belt tension adjusters

First, in 1989 the NHTSA denied a petition to recall all vehicles that use "window shade" type shoulder harness assemblies on Dec 5. The report noted that FMVSS No. 208 (Occupant Crash Protection) has permitted tension relievers since 1974. In 1985, the agency considered an amendment to No. 208 and concluded that "the added potential to improve belt fit and the added comfort of these devices is **desirable** in certain circumstances, **since it could operate to enhance proper belt use**" (50 FR 14580 as quoted in PSLR Vol 17, No 51, p.1271, 12-22-89). In 1989, NHTSA reiterated the same view. NHTSA allowed that the use of these types of devices permits the "occupant to introduce a small amount of slack to ...divert the shoulder belt away from the neck; therefore, **safety belt use is promoted**, outweighing any loss in effectiveness due to the introduction of a recommended amount of adjustment in normal use" (PSLR Vol 17, No 51, p.1271, 12-22-89).

Second, in March of 1992, NHTSA denied a petition seeking a ban or recall of safety belt tension adjusters because there is no evidence correlating the use of seat belt tension adjusters and an increased risk of passenger injuries. The product which was the subject of the petition was a device that clips onto the belt and limits the amount of tension in the belt by preventing complete retraction (similar to the Auto Comfort product discussed in Section V.B). The petition noted that such devices have been banned in Australia for many years. As a result of the petition, NHTSA studied the issue and found that "a 19-city survey of safety belt use consistently showed that 2 percent or less of people wearing safety belts had excessive slack in their shoulder belts." Further, NHTSA considered a separate study conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) of data from actual motor vehicle crash investigations. NHTSA also reviewed their computerized consumer complaint logs and found that no reports alleging that add-on seat belt adjusters caused or exacerbated injuries suffered in a motor vehicle crash.

Based on these investigations, NHTSA found that "no evidence exists to show these devices are being misused to create excess belt slack nor is there proof that using the devices cause real-world problems." Conversely, NHTSA said that "**these devices have been used extensively for the last 16 years and based on the 'in-use' data, do not pose an increased safety risk.**" (as stated in PSLR Vol 20, No. 14, p. 387)

Findings:

NHTSA recognizes the potential benefits of a device which can increase seat belt use by providing increased comfort to users through additional belt adjustments.

NHTSA investigations have found no data to support the claim that Seat belt Adjuster type devices are being misused to create excess slack or that these types of devices cause real-world problems.