

## Earthtalk

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Letter carriers may have bad weather and biting dogs to deal with, but back at the mail sorting facilities, postal workers often face one of the byproducts of the increased mechanization of sorting facilities: paper dust, which can trigger asthma, bronchitis, allergic reactions, migraines, bacterial infections, conjunctivitis and sore throats. Postal machines also send potentially carcinogenic volatile organic compounds (such as ink) and other irritants (like dust mites) into the working environment. Image by Steve Johnson, courtesy Flickr.

Tennessee spill, a coalition of 39 non-profit groups delivered a letter to then President-elect Barack Obama asking him to overturn a pending Bush administration rule change that would ease regulations on coal waste disposal. The groups contend that coal ash has already polluted 23 states and that the proposed new rule would only allow more pollution and more risks to human health and the environment. Now-President Obama has pledged to undertake a comprehensive inventory of liquid coal ash waste and propose new regulations to ensure its safe disposal. "This disaster proves that regulations around coal slurry impoundments need to be tightened, and not loosened," says Kimmons. Only time will tell if verbal commitments from Washington materialize into help on the ground.

Contacts: Sequatchie Valley Institute, svonline.org; Tennessee Valley Authority, tva.gov.

*Dear EarthTalk: I run a sorting machine at the post office, and am worried about all the paper dust swirling around the building. I asked both management and our union if this was a health or safety problem and both said no, but I'm not sure they really know. Can you set the record straight?*

-- J.G. Eddins, Phoenix, AZ

One of the drawbacks to the increasing mechanization of postal facilities is the increase in paper dust. The machines doing the grunt work loosen the dust and send it airborne where workers can breathe it in copiously. Contrary to what management and the union may say, paper dust can be a hazard to postal workers, causing and exacerbating respiratory problems. Sorting machines could also theoretically disperse contaminants (such as anthrax) intentionally sent through the mail into postal facilities, further adding to the risk of the job.

"There's no federal safety standard on it, so it's a real problem," reports Bob Williamson, president of the San Francisco chapter of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). "We've had people who have developed occupational asthma from breathing the fine dust." Other reported problems include bronchitis, allergic reactions, migraines, bacterial infections, conjunctivitis and sore throats.

In the Fall of 2008, more than 450 current and former postal employees, many in the Chicago area, signed a petition to occupational

health officials and postal unions blaming health problems on paper dust fibers inside post offices. Some are seeking health benefits to pay for related medical treatment.

"I do believe that my life is going to be shortened," Delphine Howard, a former manager at two local post offices, told Chicago's ABC7 News. "I started having severe bronchitis attacks, severe asthma attacks, and severe chest pains." She worked for the postal service from 1987 until 2005 when her doctor diagnosed her with "a medical condition that is affected by unclean air, dust particles and residue in volumes in her present employment areas." Several other Chicago area postal workers complained of similar symptoms as a result of ongoing exposure to postal dust.

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) studied the issue in 1998 and found no direct link between health and postal dust, but did discover that sorting machines could send potentially carcinogenic volatile organic compounds (such as ink) and other irritants like dust mites, into the air. The USPS told ABC7 News it had "only received two direct complaints of respiratory problems in the last several years."

Diligent cleaning of the machines can help keep the problem in check. "Vacuum and wipe down the machines every day rather than resorting to the quicker method of blowing the dust off the machines and into the air," says the APWU's Williamson, adding that workers can also wear masks to minimize breathing in of postal dust and any contaminants in the air with it. He also recommends that post offices rotate their workers around to different duties to avoid perpetual exposure to potentially harmful or aggravating activities. Besides dealing with paper dust, mail sorters frequently suffer from muscular-skeletal problems associated with repetitive motion strain.

Contacts: American Postal Workers Union (APWU), apwu.org; U.S. Postal Service, usps.com.

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## Curbside



### DODGE JOURNEY REVIEW

By Anthony Barthel

A few years ago I went on a long road trip in a vehicle that I was really excited about. It turns out after that road trip I was really disappointed in the vehicle as a road trip companion. Sure, a two-seat sport truck is a great, fun vehicle but it's not much of a road trip machine. Given the opportunity once again, I'd likely choose the Dodge Journey.

#### What's Hot

Recently I had the opportunity to spend a week with the Dodge Journey, a crossover vehicle (that's the new-fangled way of saying wagon, but with more height). The thing that struck me the most was how many little storage compartments there were throughout this seven-passenger vehicle.

In the dashboard was a little compartment on top that turned out to be the perfect spot for my bluetooth-enabled phone. There was a compartment on the passenger-side that actually had a port that allowed air-conditioned air to come in and keep beverages cool - a neat feature. Below that was a traditional glove box.

Flip up the passenger-side front seat cushion and there was another compartment big enough to put my notebook computer into (and almost leave behind - ooops!). Behind the front seats were compartments big enough to hold twelve beverage cans. Then, behind the third seat was a compartment that could hold smaller odds and ends. Somebody at Dodge goes on road trips and does so with the kids.

Additional thoughtful features that make Dodge Journey more flexible for families include a child presenter seat on all models that makes it easy for the front-row passenger to attend to a small child seated in the second row. The child presenter seat works by allowing the 60/40 fold-flat second row to move forward and rearward a total of 4.7 inches (119.4 mm) to give adults more leg room, bring children closer to the front seats and provide more cargo room behind the seats. For those who need the flexibility to transport larger materials, folding Journey's second row and the available fold-flat front passenger seat flat creates as much as nine feet of load capacity for hauling home lumber needed to assemble a playscape or skis from the slopes.

The available third-row seat is easy to operate and get into, thanks to Journey's stadium Tilt 'n Slide™ second-row seats. With the turn of a single lever on the side of the seat back, the seat cushion folds upward, and the seat slides forward. Journey's available 50/50-split-folding third-row seat provides enough room for two passengers on an as needed basis. The seatback reclines six degrees to make the ride even more comfortable.

For those who choose the five-passenger model, there is a compartment in the "way back" that is big enough to stow grocery bags. What a cool idea. It's funny when a

vehicle review is all about compartments and storage but Dodge has done such a great job with them, it's worth mentioning.

I liked a few other features in the Journey, too. For example, the instrument lighting remains on even during the daytime, something I think should be standard in all cars. There is a little L.E.D. flashlight in the way back that remains charged when docked but can be pulled out, a very cool feature.

Of course there is an available drop-down screen for rear-seat occupants which also features wireless headphones so the kids can

listen to their movies or music while the adults enjoy something else, perhaps content from the built-in 30-gigabyte hard drive or the convenient digital music player dock. In fact, there's even a 110 volt A-C outlet in the center console so the kids could bring along a video game console, plug it in, connect it to the rear screen and kill each other electronically from the beginning to the end of the trip.

Having a lot of features isn't what makes the Journey a pleasant driver, but the 3.5-liter V6 and six-speed automatic transmission are. I like the seating position in crossovers and this is as good as any, with Dodge having upgraded the materials they use in vehicle interiors.

#### What's Not

It was pretty tough to find anything I didn't like about the Journey, to be very honest. The two-tone interior was a very pleasant place to be indeed. Maybe the only thing I didn't like was the screen for the audio system, which was low on the center console. It teased in its presence as if to imply that it was a navigation system, but wasn't. No big deal, but I would have liked it to have been higher on the instrument panel and Journeys with the optional Navigation system have just such a high-positioned screen.

#### In Summary

I know there has been a lot of speculation as to the future of the Chrysler Corporation, which brings Dodge and Jeep vehicles with it. As of this writing Chrysler sales are actually up slightly with the Journey being part of that success story. If the Journey is any indication, Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep vehicles have come a long way in just a short time. While there are lots of crossovers on the market, I think this might be one of the best thought-out ones I've driven and one of the most practical vehicles available.

With the government promising to back the warranties of Chrysler Corporation, buying something like the Journey nowadays makes a lot of sense. I'd say a smart journey might be to one's local Dodge dealer.

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#### Fact Sheet

Base Price: \$23,125

Price As Tested: \$30,505

Major Options: Convenience Group (Roof Rack, Steering Wheel Redundant Audio Controls), \$695;

Premium Convenience Group (Rear A/C & Heater, U-Connect Bluetooth Phone System), \$940;

5+2 Flexible Seating Group, \$920;

Rear-Seat Video, \$1195;

Safe & Sound Group (Rear-View Camera, MyGig Entertainment System), \$695

Engine: 3.5 Liter V6

Transmission: Six-Speed Automatic

Days on the Curbside: April 6-13

Model Year: 2009 •

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