



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA  
Opening Minds. Changing Policy. Saving Lives.

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Suicide Prevention Advocates Call on VW to Pull Irresponsible Ad

*More than 31,000 suicide deaths each year should not be trivialized*

**Washington, D.C. (February 15, 2007)** – Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) today stepped up its request to Volkswagen of America to pull an ill-conceived television advertisement titled “Jumper,” which depicts a suicidal man on the ledge of a building with a crowd gathering below.

“This Volkswagen ad is irresponsible, ill-informed and ineffective,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. “Suicide is a serious public health problem and not an amusing sales gimmick. SPAN USA strongly urges VW and the rest of corporate America to become part of the solution and help break down the barrier of stigma that prevents many people from seeking the help they need for mental illness.”

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) joined SPAN USA in demanding that VW pull the ad. According to NAMI executive director Michael Fitzpatrick, “Depictions of suicide in mass media are a significant concern that has been raised by the U.S. Surgeon General, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Institute of Mental Health -- as well as organizations like NAMI. Portrayals of suicide pose the very real danger of ‘suicide contagion,’ the clinical term for ‘copy cat’ suicides. Research has found an increase in suicide by viewers when the story of an individual death by suicide or an explicit portrayal is placed in a broadcast.”

SPAN USA initially contacted Volkswagen to request the ad be pulled before it aired for the first time on the evening of Monday, February 12, 2007. Following is the text of a letter SPAN USA sent to Frank Witter, CEO of Volkswagen of America:

February 12, 2007

Mr. Frank Witter  
Chief Executive Officer  
Volkswagen of America  
3800 Hamlin Road  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326

Dear Mr. Witter:

As the executive director of the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA), I am writing to express my deep concern about a television ad that is scheduled to be launched by VW tonight. According to an article in today’s Brandweek magazine, VW has created an ad portraying a suicide attempt which is entitled “Jumper”. The article mentions that the ad will show a suicidal man standing on the ledge of a building as a crowd and police gather. The man then changes his mind after a stranger tells him about the three sub-\$17,000 models from VW. A

conversation with Mr. Keith Price confirmed that the above mentioned description is accurate. If so, SPAN USA has strong reservations about the ad. Although we have not seen the ad, if it in any way portrays an individual contemplating suicide in a manner that is meant to be entertaining to the viewer, SPAN USA would request that the ad not be aired.

Suicide is a major public health concern and one where everyone needs to be engaged in its prevention. More than 31,000 people die by suicide each year in the United States and approximately 1.8 million attempt suicide. In contrast, fewer than 20,000 die by homicide or from HIV/AIDS. Two-thirds of those who die by suicide are not receiving treatment at the time of their death.

The cost of suicide is very real to our nation. Suicides cost the U.S. \$13 billion in lost earnings each year, and suicide attempts requiring hospitalization cost the United States \$3.8 billion per year. The emotional costs to countless families and communities are incalculable.

As you may be aware, recently General Motors aired a television commercial depicting a robot that is banished from the GM assembly line premises by his colleagues, and portraying that the robot's anguish over the mistake is so great that it leads him to jump off a bridge. After a public response from organizations such as SPAN USA and others, GM agreed to edit the ad to eliminate the depiction of the robot's suicide. SPAN USA applauds GM's willingness to listen to the concerns of the suicide prevention and mental health community and hopes that VW will take appropriate action as well.

I urge you to use your company's brand to help reduce stigma and encourage those at risk to seek help early. I would be more than happy to meet with you and your ad executives to more fully understand this issue and explore partnership opportunities to prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide. The time has come where responsible advertising and the impact of public messaging must be taken seriously. I urge you to pull this ad before as it has a negative effect on your corporate image and trivializes a very significant public health problem.

Sincerely,  
Jerry Reed  
Executive Director

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*SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding in 1996, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit [www.spanusa.org](http://www.spanusa.org).*