

Honda Motor Company pulls offensive ad that includes inappropriate joke about narcolepsy

*International Community of Honda Consumers, Narcolepsy Advocates and Doctors
Rally Behind Change.org Petition*

LOS ANGELES – June 25, 2014 - On June 22, 2014, Julie Flygare, founder of Project Sleep, started a [Change.org petition](#) for the Honda Motor Company to remove the “Synth and Seattleites” advertisement (<http://youtu.be/rC-zopOGVOI>), which stated that people with narcolepsy shouldn’t be driving. With over 2,100 petition signatures in less than 36 hours and extensive social media outcry, Honda quickly pulled the advertisement on June 23, 2014 and issued an apology to the narcolepsy community.

The advertisement featured a montage of young consumers asking about the features of the new 2015 Honda Fit. One of the consumers says, “I suffer from a condition called narcoleps...” and then falls asleep mid-sentence while standing. The Honda spokesperson responds, “You *shouldn’t* be driving.” This advertisement was released on Honda’s YouTube page on June 19, 2014, as a part of Honda’s new “Fit for You” campaign, and was scheduled to begin airing on television the following week of June 23, 2014.

The petition, “Honda is ‘Fit For You’ - Unless You Have Narcolepsy” requested that Honda, “remove inaccurate ad stating people with narcolepsy shouldn’t drive and promote truthful narcolepsy awareness.” The petition gained momentum quickly, with medical doctors, Honda employees, Honda consumers, narcolepsy organizations, narcolepsy patients and loved ones all quickly joining the effort.

Narcolepsy is a neurological sleep disorder affecting 1 every in 2,000 people (approximately 200,000 Americans and 3 million people worldwide) - including many children. While excessive daytime sleepiness is an aspect of narcolepsy, it is not common for people with narcolepsy to fall asleep mid-sentence while standing. Many people diagnosed with narcolepsy are receiving treatment under the care of a board-certified physician and are driving cars safely and legally.

Due, in part, to inaccurate portrayals of narcolepsy, people with narcolepsy are subject to bullying, ridicule and discrimination in the classroom and the workplace.

Honda's [press release](#) states that the advertisement “taps into the resourcefulness of Gen Y, showcasing a unique cast of characters and the ability of the Fit to handle whatever life throws at them.” Apparently, except narcolepsy. In truth, people with narcolepsy are the ones handling whatever life throws at them - including undue ridicule.

By the evening of June 22, 2014, after receiving 1,200 signatures in less than 18 hours, the first sign of success appeared: the Honda YouTube video became PRIVATE so that no one could view it or comment on it. On Monday morning, Flygare spoke with Robyn Eagles, Honda North America's Manager of Public Relations, who assured her that the ad had been pulled and would not air on television. She also explained that the marketing team will edit the spot to remove the narcolepsy portion.

Furthermore, Honda issued the following statement to the narcolepsy community: "In a series of ads for the 2015 Honda Fit, the company attempted to demonstrate how the Fit answers the needs of the customer in a very direct, yet humorous way. One ad in particular addressed narcolepsy in a manner that is insensitive. We have heard from those with the disorder and understand their concerns with our positioning of narcolepsy within the ad. To that end, Honda has pulled the ad from its YouTube channel and will not air the "Synth in Seattlites" ad with any reference to narcolepsy on television. We apologize to those who are living with and managing this disorder each day. Please know that Honda did not intend to hurt those affected by the condition."

In an effort to raise awareness of narcolepsy, Flygare has asked to visit Honda's Los Angeles headquarters to share her inspiring narcolepsy presentation. She is currently awaiting a response from Honda.

"I am thrilled with Honda's quick response," says Flygare "I hope this is just the beginning of an important conversation with Honda, as many of their consumers, employees and employees' loved ones are living with this disorder, and it's not a joke."

View Change.org petition: www.change.org/petitions/honda-motor-company-remove-inaccurate-advertisement-stating-people-with-narcolepsy-shouldn-t-drive - intro

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About Julie Flygare, JD:

Julie Flygare, JD is the founder of Project Sleep, a leading narcolepsy spokesperson, published author, and blogger diagnosed with narcolepsy and cataplexy in 2007. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree from Brown University in 2005 and her Juris Doctor from Boston College Law School in 2009. She is the award-winning author of "Wide Awake and Dreaming: A Memoir of Narcolepsy". www.julieflygare.com

About Project Sleep:

Project Sleep is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness about sleep health and sleep disorders. The organization's feature programs include the signature SLEEP WALK national event series and the NARCOLEPSY: NOT ALONE campaign. www.project-sleep.com