

Ref: Safety Recall NHTSA #V5-215dgl 07V-514
CL-10269228-6540 NHTSA-000

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2009 MAY 12 P 3:17

RECEIVED - NHTSA

Customer Service
Forest River, Inc.
P O Box 3030
Elkhart, Indiana 46515-3030

Re: Request to Recall
Flagstaff Tent Camper, VIN 4X4CFS4197D [REDACTED]

Although you will find this letter long and tedious, I request that you read it all. I am not angry and only want to address a situation that I feel is unsafe for the general public.

In 2007, I purchased a new Flagstaff tent camper, Model 206ST, from Cahaba RV in Shelby County, AL (they have since closed). After shopping around to find a "pop-up" camper that was easy to crank (I am a senior citizen), I discovered the electric winch on the Flagstaff line. That was the main reason I bought the camper. My main complaint that I want to see corrected really is the design of the lift system, but I want to say now that it was unclear to me that a battery was also required to operate the electric winch. That makes no sense to me. But it does play a part in what happened to me.

The battery on my camper was in a vinyl box which sat on the tongue of the camper, not bolted to the tongue in any way. After going over road construction on a camping trip to Florida last spring, the battery in the box fell off and was dragged under the camper, which caused it not to function. Because of this, when I plugged the electric cord into the outlet at the campsite that afternoon, the electric winch did not work. I called the Maintenance Dept. of Cahaba RV and was told I must override the electric winch.

A strong cold front was fast approaching and a friend of mine volunteered to crank the camper up. Many turns of the crank were necessary to lift the top up (after 30 minutes, it was little more than half way up) and the winds picked up and began to blow the canvas out of the camper. My friend was being beaten by the canvas to the point he could not crank the camper up. I began trying to hold the canvas back, while watching the little plastic green line at the corner of the camper to see when it became taut. My friend was unable to see the line and when I realized that it had become taut, I stepped back and yelled for him to stop. At that moment, the top of the camper did a free fall and crashed down to the original position, leaving the canvas extending out all around the edges.

This was a very frightening experience for us all. It took eight grown men to lift the top enough for us to stuff the canvas back in so I could return home and take the camper back to the dealer for repair. I do understand that, after examining the camper and reading the instruction book more thoroughly, there were warnings about not putting limbs inside the camper until the braces were in place. But I could not help but wonder about when I am lowering the top with the electric winch and pushing the canvas in on all sides, what if it falls on my hands or arms? And if I had to override the electric winch again, what would

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keep it from falling while I was trying to install the braces (what if I had extended it a little too far past the "fully extended" position?) Incidentally, when the electric winch lifts the top, it stops automatically with just a little slack in the green line.

The owner of Cahaba RV convinced me that all that had happened to my camper was due to my negligence. He showed me the gear that had broken when my friend cranked the override past the fully extended point. That, according to him, was why the top fell. The gear was about the size of a 50 cent piece. He said he faxed a report of this repair to Forest River (in May of 2008).

Disheartened and feeling the camper was not safe, I decided to sell it. But I could not, with a clear conscience, sell it without telling the prospective buyer that the top might free fall if the override feature was used and cranked too high. I had to tell them it would not stop on its own, like a Coleman does. I am not familiar with other brands of tent campers. At the campsite in Florida last year, when my friend was cranking the camper up, he said it did not become hard to turn the crank prior to the top falling.

Recently, when I had someone interested in my camper, I put it up for him to inspect, and when I began to lower the top (after removing the braces), I immediately realized that I had forgotten to remove the screen door. The top corner next to the door had not lowered even though the other three did. When I pressed the button to raise the top so I could remove the door (it had only lowered about an inch), the top raised beside the door, causing the green line to get taut, but the other three corners did not raise. I was afraid to try to raise the top any more, for fear it would free fall again. So after much thought as to what we could do, we removed the screen door from all its Velcro fittings and pulled the door out, which caused the side over the door to slide down to match the other three sides. I was able to use the electric winch to complete letting the top down.

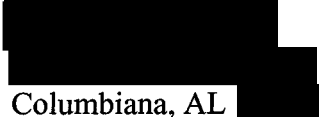

After this last experience, I feel I must address this issue because I do not know if your company is aware of this danger. I believe the design of this lift system is unsafe. I believe it should be made so that the top will go no further when it is fully extended. I believe that when I remove the braces, I should not be afraid to crank the top back up a small distance without fearing the top will fall. I would like you to know that when that top falls, it is comparable to a guillotine, with its metal edges and force.

In November of 2007, I received a letter from Forest River, telling me to take my camper back to the dealer for a repair. It seems the top would free fall if the electric winch was in a stalled position. (There was no signature on this letter, so I don't know who to direct my complaint to.) The letter had a case number and an address of a government agency that had sent out the recall. I am sending a copy of this letter to that agency, Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20590.

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I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,


Columbiana, AL 

CC: Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Admin.,
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington D.C. 20590