



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

FEB - 4 2004

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Kenneth W. Dodson
Vice President, Engineering
Thomas Built Buses, Inc
1408 Courtesy Road
High Point, N.C. 27260

NSA-214ns
PE04-012

Dear Mr. Dodson:

This letter is to advise you that the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is conducting a Preliminary Evaluation of an alleged headlight switch failure on 1999-2002 school buses manufactured by Thomas Built, Inc, and to request certain information. NHTSA requests that all information be submitted in both a hard copy and in electronic format on a 3.5" diskette(s) or CD-ROM. Please identify electronic files as "NHTSA File PE04-012"

ODI has received fleet communications reporting 18 vehicles experiencing headlight switch failure. For your review, we have included a list of VINs for the school buses experiencing the alleged defect.

Unless otherwise stated in the text, the following definitions apply to this information request:

Subject vehicles: all 1999-2002 Thomas Built FE Transit School Buses.

Subject component: Headlight Switch.

Thomas (Thomas Built Buses): and all of its divisions, subsidiaries, and affiliated enterprises. The term also includes all headquarters, regional, zone, or other offices of Thomas, or any of its divisions, subsidiaries, and affiliated enterprises, all officers, employees, agents, contractors, and consultants of Thomas, or any of its divisions, subsidiaries, or affiliated enterprises, and all records or files maintained by the company either in hard copy form or in electronic storage media.

Alleged defect: The headlight switch may overheat, smoke and/or melt causing the exterior marker lights, headlights, and/or dash lights to fail.



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888-DASH-2-DOT
888-327-4238

The submitted information is to include, but not be limited to, all written reports or documents; transcriptions, notes, or other documentation of oral communications and telephone calls; and information contained in electronic or other storage media. For any oral communication, identify the date on which the communication took place and the names, positions, and employers of the parties involved, and relate the substance or provide a memorandum or transcript (if one is available) of the communication. If Thomas cannot respond to any specific item, please state the reason why it is unable to do so. If Thomas claims that any information or material responsive to the following items need not be divulged to the NHTSA because it is privileged or the work product of an attorney, state the nature of that information or material and identify any document in which it is found by date, subject or title, name and position of the person from, and the person to, whom it was sent, and the name and position of any other recipient. You must also describe any such privilege that you claim, and explain why you believe it applies.

In order for my staff to evaluate the alleged defect, certain information is required. Pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, please provide numbered responses to the following questions. Please repeat the applicable question verbatim above each of your responses.

1. State by model and model-year the total number of subject vehicles equipped with the subject headlight switch, which Thomas has sold in the United States.
2. State the number and provide copies of all the following, from all sources, of which Thomas is aware and which relate, or could relate to the alleged defect in the subject vehicles:
 - a. owner/fleet complaints;
 - b. field reports;
 - c. crash/incident claims;
 - d. fire/incident claims;
 - e. subrogation claims;
 - f. lawsuits; and
 - g. third-party arbitration proceedings (where Thomas is a party to the arbitration)

Please list and collate your response for each category ("a" through "g") by date of claim. Please provide for each item in this response the VIN, the incident date, mileage of the vehicle at time of incident (if known), build date of vehicle, description of claim, and, where a fleet vehicle is involved, the name of the fleet, and the name and telephone number of a contact person at that fleet. For items "a" through "d," please provide all related information and reports whether or not Thomas has verified each one. For items "e" and "g," summaries are acceptable. Please identify in the summary the caption, court, docket number, and filing date of each lawsuit if a copy of the Complaint initiating the lawsuit is not provided.

3. If Thomas has issued any service bulletins, technical bulletins, advisories, or other communications to dealers, zone offices, or field offices pertaining to the alleged defect in the subject vehicles, provide a copy of each such document. If no such documents have been issued, so state.

4. State the number of warranty claims, including extended warranty claims, and requests for "good will," field, or zone adjustments received by Thomas that relate to the alleged defect in the subject vehicles. Provide a table summarizing the claims, including the following information: model year, VIN, build date, claim date, and claim code. Each problem claim code must be identified.
5. Identify and provide copies of all documents reflecting any study, survey, and investigation pertaining to the alleged defect that is known to Thomas. Include all pertinent documents, regardless of whether they are in interim, draft, or final form.
6. Identify and describe all significant modifications or changes made by or on behalf of Thomas in the manufacture or design of the subject light switch used in the subject vehicles that relate, or could relate to the alleged defect. Also include any changes to the subject light switch that occurred in model years 1998 and 2003 for similar model buses. Include any component assembly changes at any Thomas assembly plants that could relate to the alleged defect. Additionally, include and circuitry changes and changes to other components within the subject component circuitry that may relate to the alleged defect. The following information must be included for each such modification or change, if none exist, then so state.
 - a. the date, or approximate date on which the modification or change was incorporated into production;
 - b. a description of the modification or change;
 - c. the reason for the modification or change;
 - d. Thomas's opinion of the change or modification's effectiveness;
 - e. the part number of the modified part;
 - f. whether the original unmodified component was withdrawn from sale, and if so, when; and;
 - g. whether the modified or changed components can be interchanged with earlier production components.
7. State the number of the subject headlight switches (for service repairs) that have been sold for use on the subject vehicles by component name, part number (both service and engineering), supplier (name and address), and model year of the vehicle(s) for which they were intended.
8. Please provide a list of buses by model year and model that use the switch which is the subject of this investigation and which are not included in the identified "Subject Population".
8. Please provide a detailed electrical schematic of the headlight circuitry.
9. Provide a copy of all maintenance requirements published by Thomas and furnished to owners concerning the subject component.

10. Provide a list of 12 fleets, operating 10 or more of the subject buses. Include a point of contact (name, address, telephone number) and model, model year of subject buses owned.
11. Furnish Thomas's detailed opinion of the alleged defect in the subject vehicles. Please include an assessment of the following:
 - a. the causal or contributory factors which may result in the alleged defect;
 - b. the failure mode;
 - c. the risk to motor vehicle safety that it poses;
 - d. what warning(s), if any, would the operator of a subject vehicle have.

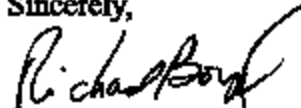
Your response to this letter, in duplicate, must be submitted to this office by **March 12, 2004**. If you find that you are unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, you must request an extension from Richard Boyd, NHTSA-ODI not later than five (5) days from the due date. If you are unable to provide all of the information requested by the original deadline, you must submit a partial response by that date with whatever information you then have available, even if you have received an extension.

This letter is being sent to your company pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, which authorizes NHTSA to conduct any investigation that may be necessary to enforce Chapter 301 of Title 49, U.S. Code. Your failure to respond promptly and fully to this letter could subject Thomas to civil penalties pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30165 or lead to an action for injunctive relief pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30163.

If you consider any portion of your response to be confidential information, include that material in a separate envelope marked "**CONFIDENTIAL**." In addition, you must submit a copy of all such material to the Office of Chief Counsel (NCC-30), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590, and comply with all other requirements for the submission of confidential business information stated in 49 CFR Part 512.

If you have any technical questions concerning this matter, please contact Nate Seymour of my staff at (202) 366-6965.

Sincerely,



Richard Boyd, Chief
Med/Heavy Duty Vehicle Division
Office of Defects Investigation
Safety Assurance

Enclosure(s):
List of fleet VINs
Cc: Mr. Timothy Blumbaugh
Freightliner LLC

NHTSA:NVS:ODI

NVS-214:NSeymour:tuf:X66965:2/3/04

cc:

NVS-214 Chron

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VIN

1T88N3B2721113377
1T88J3B2921113375
1T88N3B2321113361
1T88N3B2521113376
1T88N3B2121113360
1T88N3B2521113362
1T88N3B2921113364
1T88N3B2721113363
1T88N3B2221113366
1T88J3B2721113374
1T88N3B2021113365
1T88N3B2621113369
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1T88N4B23Y1077665
1T88N4B2221115026
1T88N4D2831126143