

mailed
12/13/05
RJB
By Andrew.

NVS-214пjs
PE05-067

Dear Mr. Nebrkom:

This letter is to inform you that the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has opened a Preliminary Evaluation (PE05-067) investigate allegations of forward dolly frame cracking on certain trailers manufactured by Heil Trailer International and to request certain information. This investigation is being opened based on an owner notification letter, advising owners of Heil Pull Trailers to inspect the frame on the forward dolly for cracks. Additionally, ODI has confirmed that one fuel delivery fleet experienced a complete separation of the forward dolly on a loaded tanker, resulting in an emergency situation while on a public road.

Unless otherwise stated in the text, the following definitions apply to these information requests:

- **Subject vehicles:** all 2002-2006 Heil Pull Trailers manufactured for sale or lease in the United States.
- **Subject component:** Forward Dolly Frame
- **Manufacturer:** Heil Trailer International (Heil), all of its past and present officers and employees, whether assigned to its principal offices or any of its field or other locations, including all of its divisions, subsidiaries (whether or not incorporated) and affiliated enterprises and all of their headquarters, regional, zone and other offices and their employees, and all agents, contractors, consultants, attorneys and law firms and other persons engaged directly or indirectly (e.g., employee of a consultant) by or under the control of Heil (including all business units and persons previously referred to), who are or, in or after 2000.

[illegible]

- **Alleged defect:** any failure, malfunction or otherwise unsatisfactory performance involving the forward dolly frame, which may contribute to, or ultimately result in a trailer separation.
- **Document:** "Document(s)" is used in the broadest sense of the word and shall mean all original written, printed, typed, recorded, or graphic matter whatsoever, however produced or reproduced, of every kind, nature, and description, and all non-identical copies of both sides thereof, including, but not limited to, papers, letters, memoranda, correspondence, communications, electronic mail (e-mail) messages (existing in hard copy and/or in electronic storage), faxes, mailgrams, telegrams, cables, telex messages, notes, annotations, working papers, drafts, minutes, records, audio and video recordings, data, databases, other information bases, summaries, charts, tables, graphics, other visual displays, photographs, statements, interviews, opinions, reports, newspaper articles, studies, analyses, evaluations, interpretations, contracts, agreements, jottings, agendas, bulletins, notices, announcements, instructions, blueprints, drawings, as-builts, changes, manuals, publications, work schedules, journals, statistical data, desk, portable and computer calendars, appointment books, diaries, travel reports, lists, tabulations, computer printouts, data processing program libraries, data processing inputs and outputs, microfilms, microfiches, statements for services, resolutions, financial statements, governmental records, business records, personnel records, work orders, pleadings, discovery in any form, affidavits, motions, responses to discovery, all transcripts, administrative filings and all mechanical, magnetic, photographic and electronic records or recordings of any kind, including any storage media associated with computers, including, but not limited to, information on hard drives, floppy disks, backup tapes, and zip drives, electronic communications, including but not limited to, the Internet and shall include any drafts or revisions pertaining to any of the foregoing, all other things similar to any of the foregoing, however denominated by Heil, any other data compilations from which information can be obtained, translated if necessary, into a usable form and any other documents. For purposes of this request, any document which contains any note, comment, addition, deletion, insertion, annotation, or otherwise comprises a non-identical copy of another document shall be treated as a separate document subject to production. In all cases where original and any non-identical copies are not available, "document(s)" also means any identical copies of the original and all non-identical copies thereof. Any document, record, graph, chart, film or photograph originally produced in color must be provided in color. Furnish all documents whether verified by the manufacturer or not. If a document is not in the English language, provide both the original document and an English translation of the document.

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 information requests. Insofar as Heil has previously provided a document to ODI, Heil may produce it again or identify the document, the document submission to ODI in which it was included and the precise location in that submission where the document is located. When documents are produced, the documents shall be produced in an identified, organized manner that corresponds with the organization of this information request letter (including all individual requests and subparts). When documents are produced and the documents would not, standing alone, be self-

explanatory, the production of documents shall be supplemented and accompanied by explanation.

Please repeat the applicable request verbatim above each response. After Heil's response to each request, identify the source of the information and indicate the last date the information was gathered.

1. State, by model and model year, the number of subject vehicles Heil has manufactured for sale or lease in the United States. For each model provide a brief description identifying its differences from other models (steel vs. aluminum frame, air vs. spring suspension, etc.)
2. State the number and provide copies of each of the following, received by Heil, which relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles:
 - a. Consumer / fleet complaints;
 - b. Field reports;
 - c. Reports involving a crash, injury, or fatality;
 - d. Reports involving a fire;
 - e. Property damage claims;
 - f. Third-party arbitration proceedings where Heil is or was a party to the arbitration; and
 - g. Lawsuits, both pending and closed, in which Heil is or was a defendant or codefendant.

For subparts "a" through "g," state the total number of each item (e.g., consumer complaints, field reports, etc.) separately. Multiple incidents involving the same vehicle are to be counted separately. Multiple reports of the same incident are also to be counted separately (i.e., a consumer complaint and a field report involving the same incident in which a crash occurred are to be counted as a crash report, a field report and a consumer complaint). For "e" through "g," provide a summary of the event.

3. Separately, for each item (complaint, report, claim, notice, or matter) within the scope of your response to Request No. 2, state the following information:
 - a. Vehicle VIN;
 - b. Vehicle's owner or fleet name (and fleet contact person), address, and telephone number;
 - c. Vehicle's model and model year;
 - d. Vehicle's mileage at time of incident, if known;
 - e. Incident date;
 - f. Date of manufacture; and
 - g. Date warranty coverage commenced.

If desired you may submit items "a" through "g" on an electronic disk. Excel or Microsoft Access 2000, are the preferred formats.

4. State, by model and model year, a total count for all warranty claims that have been paid by Heil to date that relates to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles.
5. Provide copies of any service or technical bulletins, product improvement campaign announcements, or advisories, and all other communications concerning the alleged defect

that Heil has issued or is considering issuing to fleets, dealers, zone offices, or field offices. If Heil has drafted any such communications, furnish a copy of the draft. For any such communication that has been issued, identify, by name, address, telephone number, and contact person, each entity to which it was sent, the date on which the communication was sent, and the model of vehicle to which the communication pertained. For each such communication:

- a. Provide a complete chronology, listing all activities or events, including, but not limited to, incidents involving the forward dolly, which led Heil to issue the communication;
 - b. Provide a listing (in chronological order) of all testing through which the need for the communication was identified and/or assessed, even if the testing was being conducted for another purpose. Please provide a copy of all relevant information from each listed test; and
 - c. State the number of repairs and/or replacements paid for by Heil (or any other party) that resulted from the communication identified. List your response by repairing dealer (and include the dealer's name, address, and telephone number).
6. Provide a detailed chronology of all events regarding the alleged defect starting from the time Heil first became aware of this issue, to present. Describe how Heil first became aware of the alleged defect and state the date on which Heil first became aware of the possibility of the alleged defect. Include all information including dates of related phone conversations, both internal and external meetings, meetings with fleets, manufacturers, or any other individuals and/or organizations involved in this issue and discuss the resolution, planned action, and/or the manner in which Heil plans to address this issue. Also separately, provide a copy of any/all document(s) and presentation materials that were used during any discussion and meeting(s), whether Heil generated the document(s) or the document(s) were generated by others.
 7. Explain Heil's internal process for determining when an issue warrants a safety recall vs. an Owner Notification Program (ONP). This explanation should include, but not be limited to the internal notification process from field sources, who reviews these field inputs, how those reviews are conducted (individually or by committee) and who ultimately approves any communication or notification which goes out to the field, be it an Owner Notification Program, Technical Service Bulletin, or a safety recall.
 8. Describe all modifications or changes made by, or on behalf of, Heil in the design, material composition, manufacture, quality control, supply, or installation of the subject component, from the start of production to date, which relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles. For each such modification or change, provide the following information:
 - a. The date on which the change was incorporated into vehicle production;
 - b. A detailed description of the change;
 - c. The reason(s) for the change;
 - d. The part numbers (service and engineering) of the original component;
 - e. The part number (service and engineering) of the modified component;
 - f. Whether the original unmodified component was withdrawn from production, inventory(s) and/or sale, and if so, when;

- g. When the modified component was made available as a service component; and
- h. Whether the modified component can be interchanged with earlier production components.

Also, provide the above information for any modification or change that Heil is aware of which may be incorporated into vehicle production within the next 120 days.

- 9. Provide a full description and copies of the maintenance and inspection requirements furnished by Heil or for Heil to trailer owners and lessors that relate or may relate to the alleged defect in the subject component/assemblies.
- 10. Furnish Heil's assessment of the alleged defect in the subject vehicle, including:
 - a. The causal or contributory factor(s);
 - b. The failure mechanism(s);
 - c. The failure mode(s);
 - d. The risk to motor vehicle safety that it poses; and
 - e. What warnings, if any, the operator and other people both inside and outside the vehicle would have that the alleged defect was occurring or subject component was about to failing?
- 11. State whether Heil intends to take any additional actions on this matter.

This letter is being sent to Heil 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 and to request reports and the production of things. It constitutes a new request for information. Heil's failure to respond promptly and fully to this letter could subject Heil 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. (Other remedies and sanctions are available as well.) Please note that maximum civil penalties under 49 U.S.C. § 30165 have increased as a result of the recent enactment of the Transportation Recall Enhancement, Accountability, and Documentation (TREAD) Act, Public Law No. 106-414 (signed November 1, 2000). Section 5(a) of the TREAD Act, codified at 49 U.S.C. § 30165(b), provides for civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per day, with a maximum of \$15 million for a related series of violations, for failing or refusing to perform an act required under 49 U.S.C. § 30166. This includes failing to respond to ODI information requests.

If Heil cannot respond to any specific request or subpart(s) thereof, please state the reason why it is unable to do so. If on the basis of attorney-client, attorney work product, or other privilege, Heil does not submit one or more requested documents or items of information in response to this information request, Heil must provide a privilege log identifying each document or item withheld, and stating the date, subject or title, the name and position of the person(s) from, and the person(s) to whom it was sent, and the name and position of any other recipient (to include all carbon copies or blind carbon copies), the nature of that information or material, and the basis for the claim of privilege and why that privilege applies.

Heil's response to this letter, in duplicate, together with a copy of any confidentiality request, must be submitted to this office by *January 27, 2006*. Please refer to PE05-067 in Heil's response to this letter. If Heil finds that it is unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, Heil must request an extension from me at (202) 366-4933 no later than five business days before the response due date. If Heil is unable to provide all of the information requested by the original deadline, it must submit a partial response by the original deadline with whatever information Heil then has available, even if an extension has been granted.

If Heil claims that any of the information or documents provided in response to this information request constitute confidential commercial material within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(4), or are protected from disclosure pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1905, Heil must submit supporting information together with the materials that are the subject of the confidentiality request, in accordance with 49 CFR Part 512, to the Office of Chief Counsel (NCC-113), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5219, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Heil is required to submit two copies of the documents containing allegedly confidential information (except only one copy of blueprints) and one copy of the documents from which information claimed to be confidential has been deleted.

Please call Nate Seymour at (202) 366-6965 upon your receipt of this correspondence to discuss technical and other questions concerning this matter, prior to preparing your response.

Sincerely,

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