



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

ODI RESUME

Investigation: EA19004
Prompted By: PE18016
Date Opened: 12/01/2019 **Date:** 11/20/2025
Closed:
Investigator: Robert Caple **Reviewer:** Bruce York
Approver: Tanya Topka
Subject: Steering loss due to linkage separation

MANUFACTURER & PRODUCT INFORMATION

Manufacturer: Chrysler (FCA US, LLC)
Products: 2014-2018 RAM 2500 and 2013-2018 RAM 3500
Population: 39,631

Problem Description: The steering linkage (drag link) that connects the steering box to the front wheels may separate at the adjustment (coupler) device resulting in loss of steering.

FAILURE REPORT SUMMARY

	ODI	Manufacturer	EWR D&I	Other	Total	EWR Field Reports
All Incidents:	0	2	0	0	2	0
Crashes/Fires:	0	0	0	0	0	0
Injury Incidents:	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Injuries:	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fatality Incidents:	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Fatalities:	0	0	0	0	0	0

Description of Other:

ACTION/SUMMARY INFORMATION

Action: This (EA) Engineering Analysis is closed without a manufacturer action.

Summary:

On December 17, 2018, NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) opened Preliminary Evaluation PE18016 to investigate alleged drag link failures in the steering system on model year

(MY) 2015 and 2016 Ram 2500 trucks manufactured by FCA US, LLC (FCA). The drag link failures were found to be due to a safety defect with the steering linkage where the drag link adjustable connector (used to adjust the steering system), held in position by two opposing jam nuts, can loosen. The loosening of this part can lead to wear and deterioration of the threads and eventual separation of the drag link, causing loss of steering. During the course of PE18016, it was found that two styles of drag link were used by FCA on the subject vehicles. The subject vehicles consist of two drivetrain types including four-wheel drive (4WD) and two-wheel drive (2WD). The 4WD and 2WD trucks used drag links of differing design but both incorporated the same threaded connector. In January 2019 FCA issued recall 19V-021 to address a potential loss of steering control in certain Model Year (MY) 2013-2018 4WD RAM 2500 and 3500 trucks. The trucks using the 2WD style drag link were not included in the scope of recall 19V-021.

ODI upgraded PE18016 to an Engineering Analysis EA19004 on December 12, 2019. The purpose of EA19004 was to investigate if the root cause of the safety defect addressed by recall 19V-201 also affected the 2WD trucks and evaluate FCA's rationale for not including them. ODI also monitored incoming consumer complaints regarding the remedy associated with 19V-021 and evaluated the suitability and long-term effectiveness of the prescribed repair.

In the Defect Information Report submitted for recall 19V-021, FCA stated that the outboard jam nut could loosen and result in damage to the threading of the steering drag link connector. This could cause a separation in the drag link resulting in a loss of steering control. FCA determined that only the 4WD style drag link was affected and did not recall trucks with the 2WD style drag link due to design differences that made it unsusceptible to this failure mode. The repair remedy called for the steering coupler to be tightened to the proper torque prior to the jam nut being spot welded to the coupler body. If the coupler has already become detached or correct torque cannot be obtained, the drag link is to be replaced with an updated unit that went into production on the MY2019 RAM trucks. This updated unit uses a clamp to secure the coupler in place of the jam nuts used on original style components.

In order to determine if the 2WD drag link was susceptible to the same defect found on the 4WD vehicles, ODI requested that our Vehicle Research and Test Center (VRTC) conduct testing on both RAM 2500 4WD and 2WD trucks. This testing was to determine operating conditions that might lead to loosened jam nuts of the recalled 4WD design and recreate these conditions on the 2WD vehicles to discover whether the 2WD design would also experience the loosening defect. Results from VRTC's dynamic testing indicated that when the jam nuts are significantly under-torqued, they may loosen further from regular vehicle operation on the 4WD vehicles. Further, VRTC testing does not refute FCA's assertion that the failure mechanism does not exist in the 2WD steering system.

At the time of this closing resume, ODI has only received two allegations of drag link separation on 2WD vehicles. Neither could be validated as resulting from loose jam nuts.

Since the release of recall 19V-021 ODI has received consumer complaints regarding the appearance of the spot weld applied to the defective drag link and the inability to have the steering properly aligned after welding of the jam nut. In September 2023, FCA provided owners with a supplemental Vehicle Alignment Clarification notification that provided information on an updated alignment procedure.

Regarding the spot weld remedy used on the 4WD vehicles, ODI is concerned about the remedy in that during an alignment by a non-dealer repair facility, the spot weld might not be replaced after the alignment. To date there is no complaint trend of post alignment drag link separations, weld failures or other safety related incidents on remedied vehicles.

This investigation is being closed with no further action. The closing of this investigation does not constitute a finding by NHTSA that a safety-related defect does not exist. The Agency reserves the right to take additional action if warranted by future circumstances.