March 27, 2006

06V-107
(7 Pages)

Associate Administrator for Enforcement
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S. W.
Washington, DC 20590

The following information is submitted in accordance with the requirements of 49 CFR Part 573.6 as it applies to a defect relating to motor vehicle safety.

573.6(c)(I)
American LaFrance, LLC
8500 Palmetto Commerce Parkway
Ladson, SC 29456-6700

573.6(c)(2)
American LaFrance Pumper Bodies mounted on Eagle, Metropolitan and Freightliner M2 heavy-duty class 8 chassis manufactured between May 2005 and March 2006. Identified vehicles are fitted with Austin Hardware & Supply D-Handles used to open and close compartment doors.

The D-Handles in question are manufactured by:

Austin Hardware & Supply, Inc.
1810 Satellite Blvd, Suite 100
Buford, GA 30518
Telephone: 816-246-2800

573.6(c)(3)
There are thirty-two (32) shipped vehicles with serial numbers in the range N88198 through W22933.

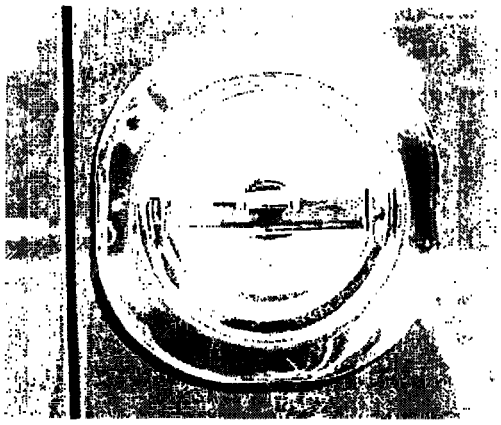
573.6(c)(4)
Percentage of vehicles expected to contain the suspect defect is 25%.

573.6(c)(5)
A customer called advising us that they were unable to open equipment compartment doors on some of their Fire Pumper Trucks. This in itself does not constitute a Safety Related Defect, however, as an emergency vehicle the personnel must have immediate access to all equipment stored on the vehicle such as jaws of life, medical

equipment or fire fighting equipment. Delayed access to this equipment due to an inoperative compartment door handle could mean the difference between life and death and in the eyes of American LaFrance this constitutes a Safety Related Defect.

Description of Defect:

Most of the compartment doors have both top and bottom latches. The door is opened using a D-HANDLE style opener shown below.



When the door is assembled the LATCH RODS used to activate the top and bottom latches are placed onto the ROD PULLER BRACKET (Figure 1) and adjusted so that when the D-HANDLE is rotated either left or right both top and bottom latches open simultaneously (Figure 2).

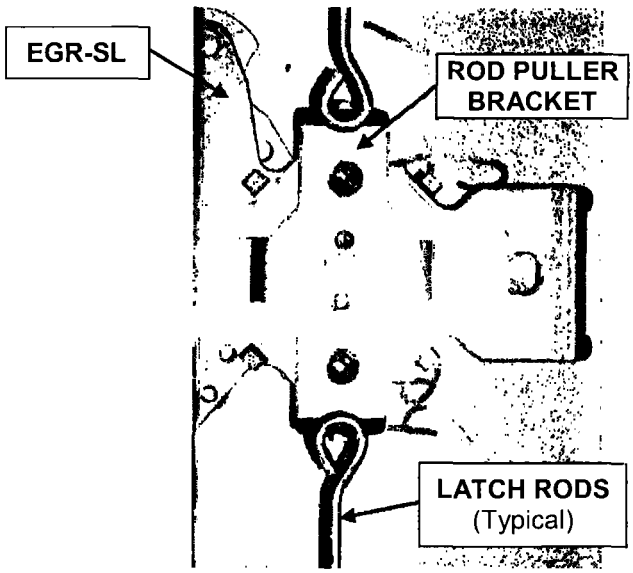


Figure 1

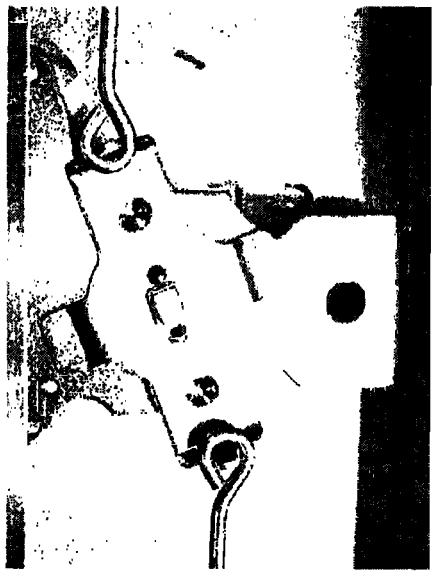


Figure 2

To keep the LATCH RODS on the ROD PULLER BRACKET a ROD RETAINER is placed on top. The ROD RETAINER is designed to be held onto the square D-HANDLE shaft by friction created when the pinch bolt is tightened (Figure 3).

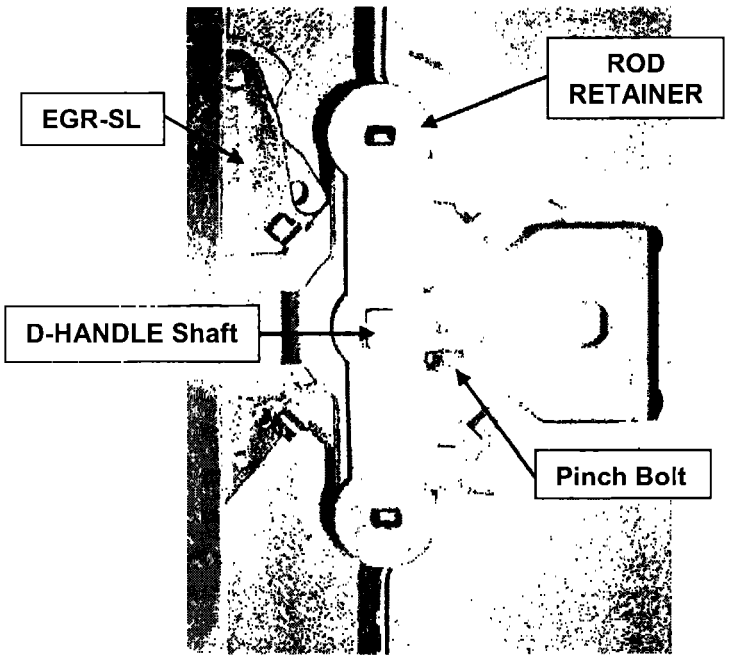


Figure 3

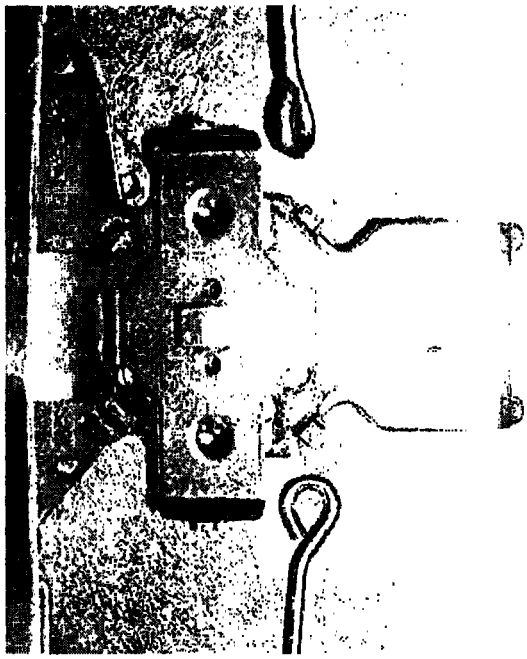


Figure 4

However, due to various assembly issues proper friction is not always achieved and in some cases when a compartment door is slammed shut the "G" forces generated cause the ROD RETAINER to separate from the D-Handle assembly shaft and it falls into the door cavity and sooner or later the LATCH RODS separate from the ROD PULLER BRACKET (Figure 4 above). When this occurs there is no way to open the compartment door without dismantling the D-Handle assembly or in an emergency forcefully opening the door using a pry bar or fireman's axe.

To resolve this issue, the ROD RETAINER has been redesigned to attach directly to tapped holes in the CAM of the new EGR-SL with two screws. The LATCH RODs, the ROD PULLER BRACKET, and the ROD RETAINER are all now sandwiched against the CAM for a robust and secure means of retaining the LATCH RODs onto the ROD RETAINER BRACKET. The EGR-SL is bolted directly to the door, see Figure 5 below to see the differences between the two designs. In this configuration there is no need for the pinch bolt as the D-HANDLE shaft is now free to float within the ROD PULLER BRACKET and ROD RETAINER. Figure 6 below shows the completed assembly.

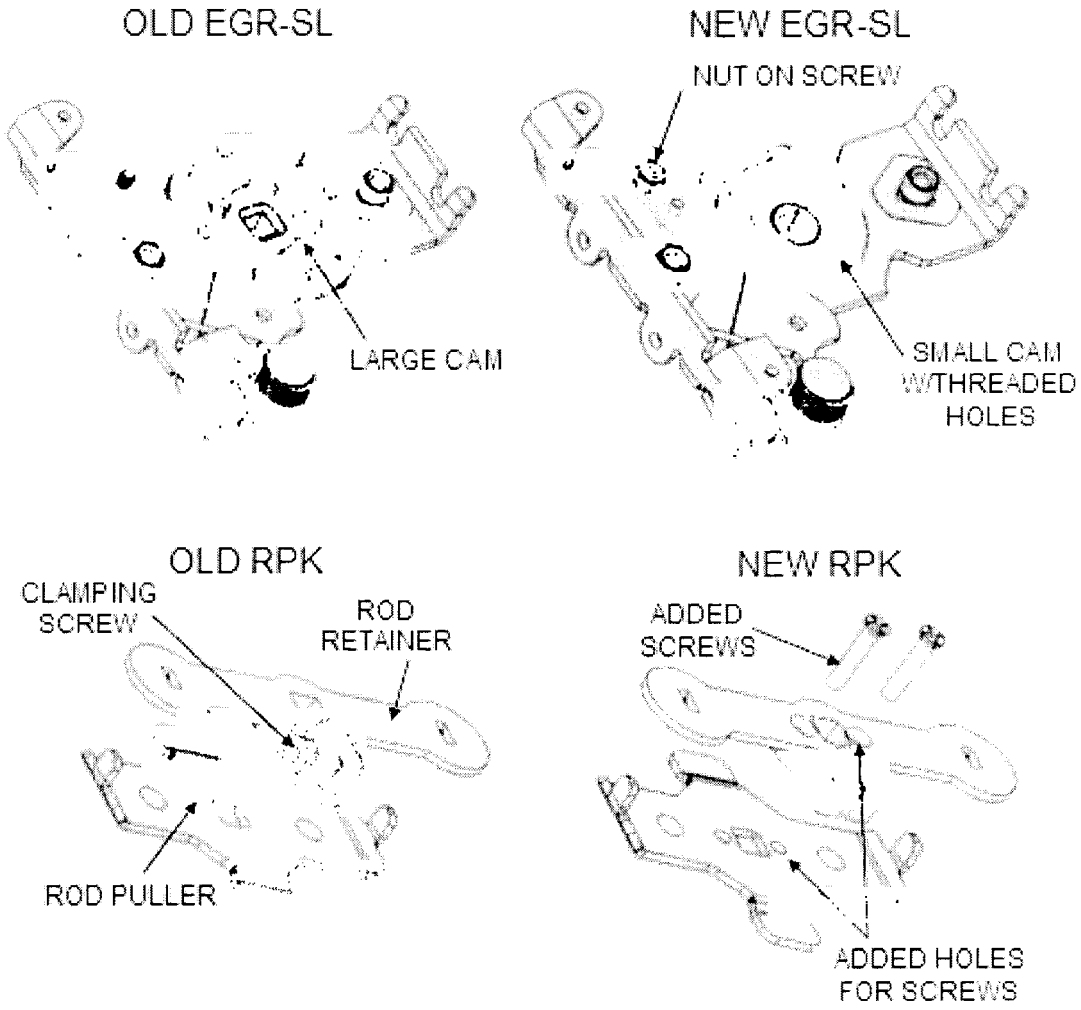


Figure 5

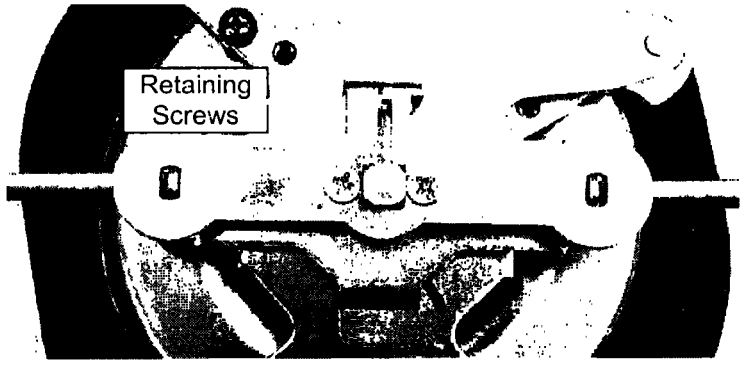


Figure 6

In the case of a large compartment that has a split door, there are two door handles. One door has the D-Handle and the second door has a latch handle that can be accessed once the first door has been opened (see Figure 6). Although there have been no reported failures on the secondary door handle assembly a similar fix has been applied to it as well (see Figure 7) In this case the whole latch assembly will be replaced under this recall.

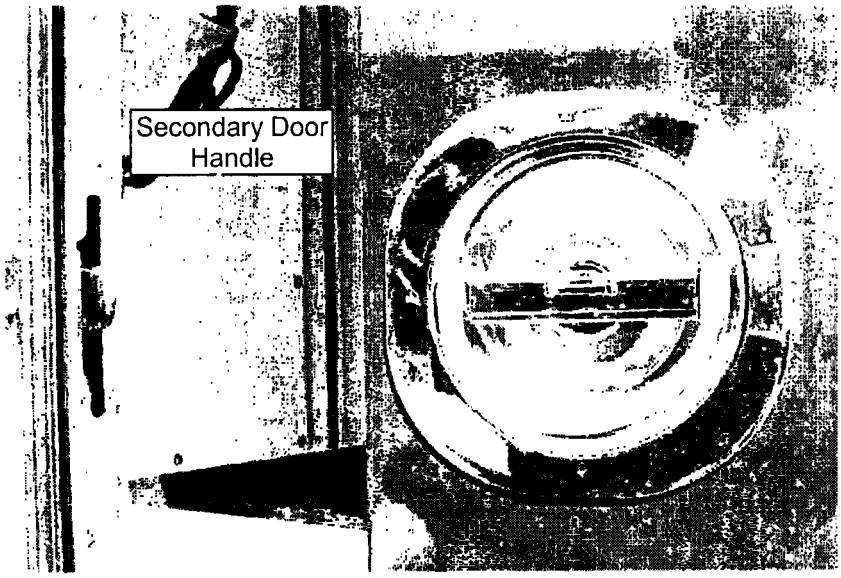


Figure 6

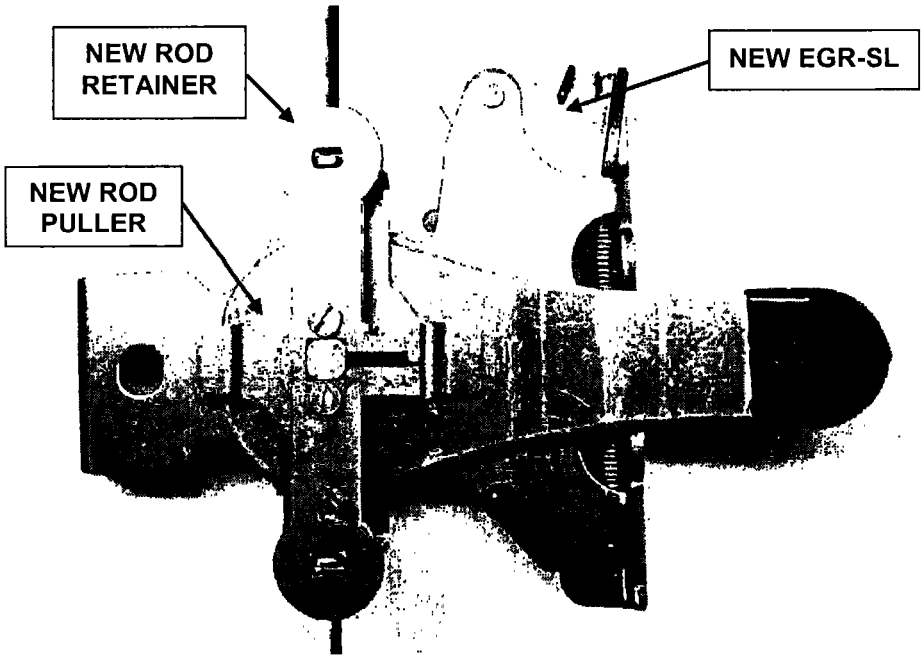


Figure 7

573.6 (c)(6)

01/27/06 A San Francisco fire department called into Customer Service explaining that they had a compartment door that could not be opened and found that the casting had fallen into the door cavity and the latch rods separated from the D-Handle bracket.

01/31/06 A customer Service rep visited the customer and together they devised a field fix which entailed drilling and tapping a hole in the end of the square D-Handle shaft and installing a machine screw and washer to keep the casting from coming off the end of the square shaft.

02/06/06 This field fix was communicated to the shop floor and this procedure was used on the assembly line. One problem with this fix was that you could not always tighten the screw down as the washer would put pressure on the casting and prevent it from turning freely so they would leave the screw loose.

03/08/06 San Francisco fire department called back indicating that they had responded to a call and could not open one of the compartment doors and had to open it forcefully. Upon inspection they discovered that the screw had backed out and the casting had separated from the D-Handle assembly shaft and the latch rods separated from the D-Handle bracket.

03/09/06 The incident was communicated to Engineering and they immediately contacted the vendor who redesigned the latch assembly to the present configuration.

03/23/06 American LaFrance, LLC has determined that the condition described in this notification constitutes a product defect and that this defect is safety related.

573.6(c)(7)
Not applicable

573.6(c)(8)
American LaFrance will initiate a voluntary owner notification and recall retro-fitting all Austin Hardware & Supply compartment door openers manufactured with the ROD RETAINER that utilizes a pinch bolt to hold it in place.

The number which American LaFrance, LLC, has assigned to this recall for tracking purposes is **ALF - 0106**.

Very Truly Yours
AMERICAN LAFRANCE, LLC

Stan R. Gornick, P. Eng.
Manager, Compliance