Chronology

On July 27, 2013, the driver of SD14 in Branson, Missouri observed that the left front axle housing on SD14 had broken at the knuckle ball. Based on the recollection of multiple RTDI staff members, as well as available photographs, SD14 was turned onto its left side during a 2012 tornado and then lifted back onto its wheels by a crane. RTDI later suspected that a fracture may have occurred due to the pressure being placed on the wheel while SD14 was being uprighted by the crane. There was no accident on July 27, 2013, and no injuries were associated with this fracture in the SD14 left front axle housing.

On August 10, 2013, RTDI inspected SD12 in Branson, Missouri and determined that the left front wheel was canted in at the top. Upon further inspections and examinations, RTDI determined that the axle housing was fractured between the knuckle ball and where the axle end is pressed into and welded to the housing. The stretch duck had been subject to prior repair to weld a small section of pipe to the bottom of the knuckle ball, which had been the subject of a prior service bulletin.

RTDI developed a modification to strengthen the axle housing, and on October 1, 2013, RTDI distributed Service Bulletin SB-14-13 – regarding a recommended front axle housing repair to the 57 affected stretch amphibious passenger vehicles – to its company-owned locations and licensees. The company-owned locations and licensees were directed to perform the required modification on their respective vehicles "as soon as practical and prior to operating 2014." The service bulletin further directed that the vehicles should be inspected daily until the repair could be conducted and removed from service if found to be vertically canted. RTDI additionally discussed the importance of conducting the repair on calls with its licensees.

After a crash involving a vehicle owned and operated by Ride the Duck of Seattle, NHTSA initiated an investigation and entered into discussions with Ride the Ducks International with regard to whether the amphibious passenger vehicles built and sold by RTDI are "motor vehicles" subject to NHTSA regulations and processes.

RTDI provided NHTSA with confirmation with regard to the stretch ducks subject to the service bulletins. Of the 57 affected vehicles, 43 operating vehicles had already been repaired, one had been dismantled and three had been partially dismantled and were non-operable. The remaining ten vehicles, all owned by Ride the Ducks Seattle, were out of service the time the original recall report was submitted to the agency.

Pursuant to its discussions with the agency, RTDI agreed to submit a formal Defect Information Report (submitted November 22, 2016) and to follow the procedures set forth in NHTSA's regulation. RTDI submitted an amended Defect Information Report on January 30, 2017.

Following subsequent communications with NHTSA and at the conclusion of an independent engineering analysis, on May 4, 2017, RTDI further amended its Defect Information Report to modify the remedy. Under the revised remedy, RTDI will replace each of the front axles with one that has a coupler welded to the axle. Prior to the installation of the coupler, the axles will undergo magna particle testing. The axles will be inspected on an annual basis thereafter. On July 12, 2017, RTDI issued a bulletin to vehicle owners advising them of the revised axle repair.

As of July 24, 2017, replacement axles were shipped to the Seattle fleet and installation of the axles is underway. Axles are in the process of being built for other RTDI fleet owners.

As of the date of this filing, RTDI requests that NHTSA administratively discontinue Recall 16V-859 and issue a new recall number so that RTDI's quarterly reporting reflects vehicles receiving the revised axle remedy. The new recall number will supersede this campaign. RTDI will reissue owner letters advising customers of the new NHTSA recall number associated with this campaign once it is issued.