



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

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

DEC 5 2003

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Leonard Barkan
Strick Corporation
225 Lincoln Highway
Fairless Hills, PA 19030-0009

NVS-214njs
EA03-022

Dear Mr. Barkan:

This letter is to inform you that the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has upgraded the Preliminary Evaluation (PE03-027) to an Engineering Analysis (EA03-022) in order to further investigate allegations of wheel-end failures of semi trailers manufactured by Strick Corporation and to request additional information.

On June 30, 2003, ODI opened a Preliminary Evaluation (PE03-027) to investigate alleged wheel-end failures on Strick trailers. The original resume and PE identified the subject component as a Stemco Advantage System wheel-end. During the course of the investigation we learned that the Advantage System is the current premium wheel-end offered by Stemco and the wheel-ends of interest are "greased wheel-ends." Specific components include, Stemco steel hubcaps, Stemco seals, Arvin Meritor Tapered (TN) axles and either Timkin or Hyatt bearings lubricated with Mobil SHC 007 semi-fluid grease.

Product History

Departing from the traditional 90-weight gear oil, Mobil introduced SHC 007 semi-fluid grease to the industry in the early 1990s. Mobil SHC 007 was claimed to extend service intervals to between 300,000 and 500,000 miles (per May 14, 1998 meeting minutes). After several failures, including wheel separations, the industry initiated several meetings throughout the country to determine what action should be taken. Strick was present at many of these meetings, including the one in St. Louis, MO on August 11, 1998.

Xtra Corporation, a Strick customer, initiated the St. Louis meeting. A task group was formed to devise an installation, inspection, and maintenance plan for greased wheel-ends. As we understand it, a plan was prepared about five years ago, and has been used successfully by some fleets.



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Similarly, The Maintenance Council (TMC) updated their RP-631 Recommendations for Wheel End Lubrication, in September of 1999 to include semi-fluid grease recommendation. The revision reflected the fill levels adopted at the St. Louis meeting.

ODI has upgraded this investigation in order to determine why a group of 255 trailers, produced eight months after the St. Louis meeting, continue to suffer wheel-end failures. Information learned during the PE indicates that variances in the grease from batch to batch may be contributing to continued wheel-end failures.

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

- **Subject vehicles:** All MY 1997 – 2003 Strick semi-trailers manufactured for sale or lease in the United States and equipped with the greased wheel-ends.
- **Subject component:** Greased wheel-end unit including all parts and lubricants.
- **Manufacturer:** Strick Corporation (Strick), 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 Strick including all business units and persons previously referred to), who are or, in or after 1996. Communications to, from or intended for zone representatives, fleets, dealers, suppliers of any component, or other field locations, including but not limited to people who have the capacity to obtain information from dealers.
- **Alleged defect:** Any failure, malfunction, or otherwise unsatisfactory performance involving greased wheel-ends on a Strick trailer which involves a thermal event, severe overheating, fire at the wheel-end of the axle (wheel-end), or a partial or complete wheel separation.
- **Grease type:** "Grease type," means to identify the product name of the grease used by Strick to lubricate the wheel-end when the trailer was built; the manufacturer name of the grease used by Strick to lubricate the wheel-end; and the identification number of the grease.
- **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 Strick, 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 continue its evaluation of 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 Strick has previously provided a document to ODI, Strick 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 Strick's response to each request, identify the source of the information and indicate the last date the information was gathered. Please be aware this information requests expands its scope to trailers equipped with greased wheel-ends lubricated by various lubricant producers.

1. State by model and model year, the number of subject vehicles Strick has manufactured for sale or lease in the United States. Separately, for each subject vehicle manufactured to date by Strick, state the following:
 - a. Vehicle identification number (VIN);
 - b. Model;
 - c. Model Year;

- d. Date of manufacture;
- e. Date warranty coverage commenced;
- f. Grease type; and
- g. The State in the United States where the vehicle was originally sold or leased (or delivered for sale or lease).

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

2. State the number of each of the following, received by Strick, or of which Strick is otherwise aware, which relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles:
 - a. Consumer complaints, including those from fleet operators;
 - b. Field reports, including dealer field reports;
 - c. Reports involving a crash, injury, or fatality, based on claims against the manufacturer involving a death or injury, notices received by the manufacturer alleging or proving that a death or injury was caused by a possible defect in a subject vehicle, property damage claims, consumer complaints, or field reports;
 - d. Property damage claims;
 - e. Third-party arbitration proceedings where Strick is or was a party to the arbitration; and
 - f. Lawsuits, both pending and closed, in which Strick is or was a defendant, codefendant, or third party defendant.

For subparts "a" through "d," 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).

In addition, for items "c" through "f," provide a summary description of the alleged problem, causal and contributing factors, and Strick's assessment of the problem, with a summary of the significant underlying facts and evidence. For items "d" and "f," identify the parties to the action, as well as the caption, court, docket number, and date on which the complaint or other document initiating the action was filed.

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. Strick's file number or other identifier used;
 - b. The category of the item, as identified in Request No. 2 (i.e., consumer complaint, field report, etc.);
 - c. Vehicle owner or fleet name (and fleet contact person), address, and telephone number;
 - d. Vehicle's Identification Number (VIN);
 - e. Vehicle's model and model year;
 - f. Vehicle's mileage at time of incident;
 - g. Grease type;

- h. Incident date;
- i. Report or claim date;
- j. Whether a crash is alleged;
- k. Whether a fire is alleged;
- l. Whether property damage is alleged;
- m. Number of alleged injuries, if any; and
- n. Number of alleged fatalities, if any.

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

- 4. State the total counts that have been paid by Strick to date, by model and model year, that relate to, or may relate to the alleged defect, of: warranty claims; extended warranty claims; claims for good will services that were provided; field, zone, or similar adjustments and reimbursements; and warranty claims or repairs made in accordance with a procedure specified in a technical service bulletin or customer satisfaction campaign. Separately, for each such claim, state the following information:
 - a. Strick's claim number;
 - b. Vehicle owner or fleet name, (and fleet contact person) address, and telephone number;
 - c. VIN;
 - d. Repair date;
 - e. Vehicle mileage at time of repair;
 - f. Repairing dealer's or facility's name, telephone number, city and state or ZIP code;
 - g. Labor operation number;
 - h. Problem code;
 - i. Replacement part number(s) and description(s);
 - j. Grease type;
 - k. Concern stated by customer; and
 - l. Comment, if any, by dealer/technician relating to claim and/or repair.
- 5. Produce copies of all documents and communications, that relate to, or may relate to the alleged defect, that were transmitted, in any way, between Strick and its customers, owners, and operators of the subject vehicles. For each identified customer, owner, and operator, provide their name, address, telephone number, and the total number of Strick trailers. Further, organize the documents chronologically and include: the date the document was created, transmitted and received; the sender's name and title; and the recipient's name and title. Documents are to include sales orders, warranty items, service bulletins, emails, phone notes, etc. Individually repeat this submission format for each customer, owner, and operator. Each document must be submitted separately for each party. If Strick sent any communications to its dealers with instructions to forward to customers, you must provide verification that the dealership forwarded the information. If no verification is provided, it will be considered an internal communication and removed from the "Customer packet."

6. Identify and describe all meetings, forums and conferences at which Strick personnel, and/or agents, were present concerning greased wheel-ends from January 1, 1997 to present. State in detail all information received by, or communicated from Strick, that relate to, or may relate to the alleged defect.

For each such event, include the following information. Submit all requested information in an "Event packet," similar to the format requested in number 5.

- a. Event name, date, location, and names of Strick personnel (include title) in attendance;
 - b. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of any company, entity or organization in attendance at each such event;
 - c. Produce copies of all documents that relate to, or may relate to the alleged defect, that were obtained, produced or provided by Strick at each such event. This includes the Agenda, Sign-in sheet(s), handout(s), Strick personnel notes, formal notes from event secretary, any additional communications dispersed to event attendees afterwards, etc.; and
 - d. Provide a description of how the information obtained, produced, provided, or discussed at each such event, was communicated, used and dispersed throughout Strick, Strick's suppliers, and Strick's customers.
7. What percentage of new Strick semi-trailers leave the manufacturing plant via:
 - a. roadway; or
 - b. railroad.

For railroad departures provide the VINs of the Strick Trailers transported by that method.

8. Describe Strick's system for tracking grease type used in their wheel-ends. In addition, for each container of Mobil SHC 007 grease used in the production of the subject vehicles, provide the following information:
 - a. Mobil's tracking identification number;
 - b. The date(s) the container(s) of Mobil SHC 007 grease was received at Strick's assembly plant;
 - c. The date(s) Strick placed the container(s) of Mobil SHC 007 grease on line for production use;
 - d. The earliest date(s) the empty Mobil SHC 007 grease container was replaced, emptied, or removed from Strick's production line; and
 - e. VINs of the semi-trailers that received Mobil SHC 007 grease from each container.
9. Produce all copies of Mobil's handling and storage recommendation for SHC 007 semi fluid grease which have been used, or are currently in effect. Further, produce all copies of Strick's handling and storage practices for Mobil's SHC 007 Semi-fluid grease. Provide any documentation that will verify that Strick followed these practices during subject vehicle production.

10. Provide contact information for the following personnel from the plant(s) where the subject vehicles were built. Include name, title, length of service, a brief job description and a direct dial phone number of:
 - a. Manufacturing Plant Manager;
 - b. Engineering Manager;
 - c. Purchasing Manager(s) who handle purchases of wheel-end grease; and
 - d. Materials handling Manager(s) who oversees wheel-end grease.

11. Produce copies of all documents transmitted, by any method, between Strick and any wheel-end component supplier, and any wheel-end grease supplier, that relate to, or may relate to the alleged defect. Organize the document(s) chronologically by date of receipt.

12. Describe all assessments, analyses, tests, test results, studies, surveys, simulations, investigations, inquiries and/or evaluations (collectively, "actions") that have been conducted, are being conducted, are planned, or being planned by, or for, or with Strick's knowledge, that relate to, or may relate to the alleged defect. For each such action, provide the following information:
 - a. Action title or identifier;
 - b. The actual or planned start date;
 - c. The actual or expected end date;
 - d. Brief summary of the subject and objective of the action;
 - e. Engineering group(s)/supplier(s) responsible for designing and for conducting the action; and
 - f. A brief summary of the findings and/or conclusions resulting from the action.

For each action identified, provide copies of all documents related to the action, regardless of whether the documents are in interim, draft, or final form. Organize the documents chronologically by action.

13. Describe all modifications or changes made by, or on behalf of, Strick in the design, material composition, manufacture, grease type used, 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 or approximate date on which the modification or change was incorporated into production of the subject component;
 - b. A detailed description of the modification or change;
 - c. The reason(s) for the modification or change;
 - d. The part numbers (service and engineering) of the original component(s);
 - e. The part numbers (service and engineering) of the modified component(s);

- f. Whether the original unmodified component, and/or grease type, was withdrawn from production 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.

This letter is being sent to Strick 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. Strick's failure to respond promptly and fully to this letter could subject Strick 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 Strick 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, Strick does not submit one or more requested documents or items of information in response to this information request, Strick 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.

Strick's response to this letter, in duplicate, together with a copy of any confidentiality request, must be submitted to this office by **January 30, 2004**. Please refer to **EA03-022** in Strick's response to this letter. If Strick finds that it is unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, Strick must request an extension from me at (202) 366-2850 no later than five business days before the response due date. If Strick 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 Strick then has available, even if an extension has been granted.

If Strick 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, Strick 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. Strick 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.

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

Sincerely,


Kathleen C. DeMeter, Director
Office of Defects Investigation

