



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

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

OCT 18 2006

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Timothy Blubaugh
Freightliner Incorporated
4747 N. Channel Avenue
Portland, OR 97217

NVS-214bby
PE06-033

Dear Mr. Blubaugh:

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 (PE06-033) to investigate weak or incomplete welds that may develop in the steering column assembly in 2004 and 2005 Model Year (MY) Freightliner Columbia and Century class vehicles. The cracks that may develop in the steering column welds could potentially lead to steering column failures, difficulty controlling the vehicle and a crash resulting in injury or death.

This office has received Early Warning aggregate data submitted to NHTSA by Freightliner that suggests that a steering (EWR code 01) problem exists for the 2004 and 2005 Columbia and Century class vehicles. The count of field reports submitted for the first quarter of 2006 was significantly higher than the average of the previous 6 quarters for the aggregate steering data.

Further review of the EWR data found 3 field reports that described steering column failures as a result of welds cracking or breaking.

ODI considers failures of the steering column on a motor vehicle to be a safety related issue regardless of when this failure occurs. A crack that develops at low speeds when the loads on the steering column are highest might reach the point of failure while at highway speeds. The fact this office considers steering column failure and increased steering effort to be a safety related issue is evidenced by our history of investigating these types of defects. A table identifying the investigations and recalls that the ODI has opened or received, that relate to defects possibly resulting in steering shaft fractures or increased steering effort as a result of steering component failure, has been attached for your review. This table also identifies the recalls that resulted from the investigation.

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

- **Subject Vehicles:** All MY 2004 through 2005 Freightliner Century and Columbia class vehicles.



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- **Subject Component:** All steering column assemblies manufactured by Douglas Autotech Corporation (DAC) and installed on the subject vehicles.
- **Freightliner:** Freightliner, 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 Freightliner (including all business units and persons previously referred to), who are or, in or after 1996, were involved in any way with any of the following related to the alleged defect in the subject vehicles:
 - a. Design, engineering, analysis, modification or production (e.g. quality control) of subject components;
 - b. Testing, assessment or evaluation of subject components;
 - c. Consideration, or recognition of potential or actual defects, reporting, record-keeping and information management, (e.g., complaints, field reports, warranty information, part sales), analysis, claims, or lawsuits.
- **Alleged defect:** Any cracks that develop in the subject component on the subject vehicles.
- **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 Freightliner, 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.

- **Other terms:** To the extent that they are used in these information requests, the terms "claim," "consumer complaint," "dealer field report," "field report," "fire," "fleet," "good will," "make," "model," "model year," "notice," "property damage," "property damage claim," "rollover," "type," "warranty," "warranty adjustment," and "warranty claim," whether used in singular or in plural form, have the same meaning as found in 49 CFR 579.4.

In order for my staff to evaluate the alleged defect, certain information is required. Please provide numbered responses to the following information requests. 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 Freightliners response to each request, identify the source of the information and indicate the last date the information was gathered. If requested information is unavailable, so state and provide a brief explanation. Along with your written response, please provide this information in Microsoft Word 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "IR Response."

1. State, by model and model year, the number of subject vehicles Freightliner has manufactured for sale or lease in the United States. Separately, for each subject vehicle manufactured to date state the following:
 - a. Vehicle Identification Number;
 - b. Model;
 - c. Model Year;
 - d. Date of manufacture;
 - e. Date warranty coverage commenced;
 - f. The State in the United States where the vehicle containing the subject engine was originally sold or leased (or delivered for sale or lease).

Provide the table in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "PRODUCTION DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table designed for this submission.

2. State the number of each of the following, received by Freightliner, or of which Freightliner is otherwise aware, which 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. Third-party arbitration proceedings where Freightliner is or was a party to the arbitration; and,
 - e. Lawsuits, both pending and closed, in which Freightliner is or was a defendant or codefendant.

For subparts "a" through "e," state the total number of each item (e.g., consumer complaints, field reports, etc.) separately for each model and model year. 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 "e," provide a summary description of the alleged problem and causal and contributing factors and Freightliners assessment of the problem, with a summary of the significant underlying facts and evidence. For items "d" and "e", 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. Freightliners 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 VIN;
 - e. Vehicle's make, model and model year;
 - f. Vehicle's mileage at time of incident;
 - g. Incident date;
 - h. Incident state;
 - i. Report or claim date;
 - j. Whether a crash is alleged;
 - k. Whether property damage is alleged;

- l. Number of alleged injuries, if any;
- m. Number of alleged fatalities, if any;
- n. Whether the item is related to the alleged defect;
- o. Whether or not Freightliner received a subrogation claim regarding the incident (Y/N);
- p. Alleged cause of the failure;
- q. Complaint summary;
- r. Consumer comments; and,
- s. Freightliners assessment of the allegation;

Provide this information in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "REQUEST NUMBER TWO DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table designed for this submission.

4. Produce electronic copies of all documents related to each item within the scope of Request No. 2. Organize the documents separately by category (i.e., consumer complaints, field reports, etc.) and describe the method Freightliner used for organizing the documents.
5. State, by model and model year, a total count for all of the following categories of claims, collectively, that have been paid by Freightliner to date where the subject component was replaced or repaired on the subject vehicles: 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. Separately, for each such claim, state the following information:
 - a. Freightliners claim number;
 - b. Vehicle owner or fleet name (and fleet contact person) and telephone number;
 - c. VIN;
 - d. Vehicle's make, model, and model year;
 - e. Repair date;
 - f. Vehicle mileage at time of repair;
 - g. Repairing dealer's or facility's name, telephone number, city and state or ZIP code;
 - h. Labor operation number;
 - i. Problem code;
 - j. Causal part (if identified);
 - k. Whether a crack of any size was identified in the steering column;
 - l. Replacement part number(s) and description(s);
 - m. Repair procedure performed;
 - n. Concern stated by customer; and
 - o. Comments, by dealer/technician relating to claim and/or repair;

Provide this information in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "WARRANTY DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table designed for this submission.

6. Describe in detail the search criteria used by Freightliner to identify the claims identified in response to Request No. 5, including the labor operations, problem codes, part numbers and any other pertinent parameters used. Provide a list of all labor operations, labor operation descriptions, problem codes, and problem code descriptions applicable to the alleged defect in the subject vehicles. State, by make and model year, the terms of the new vehicle warranty coverage offered by Freightliner on the subject vehicles (i.e., the number of months and mileage for which coverage is provided and the vehicle systems that are covered). Describe any extended warranty coverage option(s) related to the alleged defect that Freightliner offered for the subject vehicles and state by option, model, and model year, the number of vehicles that are covered under each such extended warranty.
7. Produce electronic copies of all service, warranty, and other documents that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles, that Freightliner has issued to any dealers, regional or zone offices, field offices, fleet purchasers, or other entities. This includes, but is not limited to, bulletins, advisories, informational documents, training documents, or other documents or communications, with the exception of standard shop manuals. Also include the latest draft copy of any communication that Freightliner is planning to issue within the next 120 days.
8. Provide drawings, assembly drawings, and schematics that show the steering column and the steering column assembled in the vehicle. Identify on the drawings where the welds that are allegedly cracking and failing are located. Also identify on these drawings what components potentially limit how far the steering column can descend if a failure occurs.
9. Describe all assessments, analyses, tests, test results, studies, surveys, simulations, investigations, inquiries and/or evaluations (collectively, "actions") that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect or any of the subject components installed in the subject vehicles that have been conducted, are being conducted, are planned, or are being planned by, or for, Freightliner. 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 electronic 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.

10. Identify and describe all modifications or changes made by, or on behalf of Freightliner in the design, material composition, manufacture, quality control, supply, or installation of the subject component in subject vehicles from the start of production to date. For each such modification or change, provide the following information:

- a. The model and model year of the engine that the design applies to;
 - b. The date or approximate date on which the modification or change was incorporated into production;
 - c. A detailed description of the modification or change;
 - d. The reason(s) for the modification or change;
 - e. The part numbers (service and engineering) of the original component;
 - f. The part number (service and engineering) of the modified component;
 - g. Whether the original unmodified component was withdrawn from production and/or sale, and if so, when;
 - h. When the modified component was made available as a service component; and
 - i. Whether the modified component can be interchanged with earlier production components.
11. State the number of each of the following that Freightliner has sold that may be used in subject vehicles by component name, part number (both service and engineering/production), model and model year of the vehicle/engine in which it is used and month/year of sale (*including the cut-off date for sales, if applicable*):
- a. Subject component;
 - b. Any new design of the subject component intended to replace the subject component.
 - c. Any kits that have been released, or developed, by Freightliner for use in service repairs to the subject engine of the subject component.

For each component part number, provide the supplier's name, address, and appropriate point of contact (name, title, and telephone number) Also identify by make, model and model year, any other vehicles of which Freightliner is aware that contain the same part number component, whether installed in production or in service, and state the applicable dates of production or service usage.

Provide this information in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "REQUEST NUMBER ELEVEN DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table designed for this submission.

12. Furnish a copy of the design, test, and quality assurance specifications, standards, and drawings for the subject component used on subject vehicles. Include in this information any part numbers used to identify the different designs and how to interpret that part number.
13. State whether Freightliner has ever conducted, or is aware of, any returned part analyses in subject vehicles related to the alleged defect. If so, describe, and provide electronic copies of all documents and photographs relating to, any and all returned part analyses of subject components. Include in your description the total number of such parts returned, the number analyzed, a description of how they were analyzed, a listing of all such components that were inspected, tested, evaluated, or assessed by stating the vehicle's VIN, recall repair date, mileage at the recall repair date, date of build, anomalies detected, and reason for specific

component analysis. Include any and all material showing the frequencies of failed components as a function of service life or mileage.

14. Provide copies of all documents or communications between Freightliner and Douglas Autotech Corporation regarding the alleged defect in the subject component. Organize the document copies in chronological order.
15. Provide copies of all documents transmitted internally within Freightliner that relate to the alleged defect in the subject component. Organize the document copies in chronological order.
16. Provide copies of all failure mode and effects analyses related to the alleged defect in the subject component.
17. Furnish Freightliners assessment of the alleged defect in the subject vehicles, including:
 - a. An assessment of the failure mechanism including all causal or contributory factors;
 - b. An assessment of the design factors of the subject component that may influence the durability of the subject component;
 - c. An assessment of the manufacturing factors that may influence the durability of the subject component;
 - d. An assessment of the vehicle assembly factors that may influence the durability of the subject component;
 - e. An assessment of the use factors of the subject component that may influence the durability of the subject component.
 - f. Please be as specific as possible in your answers and provide engineering explanations for how various factors affect the steering column durability.
 - g. Any warning symptoms;
 - h. The root cause of the failures;
 - i. Its potential effect on occupant safety; and
 - j. The potential for future occurrences of the alleged defect in the subject vehicles;

If Freightliner 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, Freightliner does not submit one or more requested documents or items of information in response to this information request, Freightliner 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.

Freightliners response to this letter, in duplicate, together with a copy of any confidentiality request, must be submitted to this office by **November 10, 2006**. Please refer to **PE06-033** in Freightliners response to this letter. If Freightliners finds that it is unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, Freightliners must request an extension from Mr. Richard Boyd at (202) 366-4933 no later than five business days before the response due date. If

Freightliner 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 Freightliner then has available, even if an extension has been granted.

If Freightliner 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, Freightliner 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. Freightliner is required to submit two copies of the documents containing allegedly confidential information (accept 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 Bruce York of my staff at (202) 366-6938.

Sincerely,



Richard P. Boyd, Chief
Medium and Heavy Duty Vehicle Division
Office of Defects Investigation

Enclosure 1, one CD ROM titled Data Collection Disc containing one files