



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE.  
Washington, DC 20590

JUN 16 2015

**CERTIFIED MAIL**  
**RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

Mr. Steven Mann  
Vice President - Engineering  
Fontaine Fifth Wheel  
7574 Commerce Circle  
Trussville, AL 35173

NVS-214njs  
PE15-023

Dear Mr. Mann:

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 (PE15-023) to investigate allegations of fifth wheel malfunctions in certain model year (MY) 2011 through 2014 Ultra LT fifth wheels and to request additional information to assist us in our investigation.

This office learned from Fontaine about two fatalities after a trailer separated from an Ultra LT fifth wheel. ODI acknowledges Fontaine's belief that the crash was the result of operator error. However, ODI is concerned that the Ultra LT fifth wheel design may be experiencing higher rates of failure than other peer fifth wheels currently in use. Fontaine has twice issued Technical Service Bulletins (TSB #10036732, 10044108) for issues with the Ultra LT that describe conditions that could lead to trailer separation. After the first TSB issued in 2011, ODI opened investigation PE11-012 with Daimler Trucks North America (DTNA). DTNA and three other OEMs recalled the subject Ultra LT fifth wheels as a result.

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

- **Subject component:** 2011-2014 Fontaine Ultra LT fifth wheels produced for sale or lease in the United States.
- **Peer component:** all other 2011-2014 model Fontaine fifth wheels produced for sale or lease in the United States.
- **Fontaine:** Fontaine Fifth Wheel, 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 Fontaine (including all business units and persons previously referred to), who are or, in or after 2009, were involved in any way with any of the following related to the alleged defect in the subject component:

- a. Design, engineering, analysis, modification or production (e.g. quality control);
  - b. Testing, assessment or evaluation;
  - 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; or
  - d. Communication to, from or intended for zone representatives, fleets, dealers, or other field locations, including but not limited to people who have the capacity to obtain information from dealers.
- **Alleged defect:** Partial or complete trailer separation from the fifth wheel.
  - **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 Fontaine, 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 Fontaine 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. Pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, provide numbered responses to the following information requests. Insofar as Fontaine has previously provided a document to ODI, Fontaine 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.

Repeat the applicable request verbatim above each response. After Fontaine’s response to each request, identify the source of the information and indicate the last date the information was gathered.

1. State, by make, model and model year, the number of subject and peer components Fontaine has manufactured for sale or lease in the United States. Separately, for each subject and peer component manufactured to date by Fontaine, state the following:
  - a. Serial Number of component;
  - b. Make;
  - c. Model;
  - d. Model Year;
  - e. Component date of manufacture;
  - f. Facility where component was manufactured;
  - g. Production shift (if multiple shifts are utilized); and
  - h. Purchaser of component (OEM and aftermarket)

Provide the table in Excel, or a compatible format, entitled “PRODUCTION DATA.” A pre-formatted Data Collection File, which provides further details regarding this submission, will be emailed to you.

2. State the number of each of the following, received by Fontaine, or of which Fontaine is otherwise aware, which relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject and peer components:

- a. Consumer complaints;
- b. Field reports, including dealer field reports;
- c. Reports involving a crash, fire, injury or fatality;
- d. Property damage claims;
- e. Third-party arbitration proceedings where Fontaine is or was a party to the arbitration;  
and
- f. Lawsuits, both pending and closed, in which Fontaine is or was a defendant or codefendant.

For subparts “a” through “f,” 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 and causal and contributing factors and Fontaine’s assessment of the problem, with a summary of the significant underlying facts and evidence. For items “d” through “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. Fontaine’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’s name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number;
  - d. VIN;
  - e. Make, Model, Model Year of the vehicle;
  - f. Subject or peer component’s serial number;
  - g. Subject or peer component make, model, and model year;
  - h. Subject or peer component date of manufacture;
  - i. Subject or peer component mileage at time of incident;
  - j. Subject or peer component time in service at time of incident;
  - k. Incident date;
  - l. Report or claim date;
  - m. Whether a crash is alleged;
  - n. Whether property damage is alleged;
  - o. Number of alleged injuries, if any; and
  - p. Number of alleged fatalities, if any.

Provide this information in Excel, or a compatible format, entitled “REQUEST NUMBER TWO DATA.” A pre-formatted Data Collection File, which provides further details regarding this submission, will be emailed to you.

4. Produce 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 Fontaine used for organizing the documents.
5. State, by make, model and model year, a total count for all of the following categories of claims, collectively, that have been paid by Fontaine to date that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject and peer components: 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. Fontaine's claim number;
- b. Vehicle owner's name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number;
- c. VIN;
- d. Repair date;
- e. Subject or peer component date of manufacture;
- f. Subject or peer component warranty start date;
- g. Subject or peer component mileage at time of repair;
- h. Subject or peer component time in service at time of repair;
- i. Repairing dealer's or facility's name, telephone number, city and state or ZIP code;
- j. Labor operation number;
- k. Problem code;
- l. Replacement part number(s) and description(s);
- m. Concern stated by customer; and
- n. Comment, if any, by dealer/technician relating to claim and/or repair.

Provide this information in Excel, or a compatible format, entitled "WARRANTY DATA." A pre-formatted Data Collection File, which provides further details regarding this submission, will be emailed to you.

6. Describe in detail the search criteria used by Fontaine 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 components. State, by make, model, and model year, the terms of the new warranty coverage offered by Fontaine covering the subject and peer components (i.e., the number of months and mileage for which coverage is provided and the component systems that are covered). Describe any extended warranty coverage option(s) that Fontaine offered for the subject and peer vehicles and state by option, make, model, and model year, the number of subject and peer components that are covered under each such extended warranty.
7. Produce copies of all service, warranty, and other documents that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject and peer components, that Fontaine 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 Fontaine is planning to issue within the next 120 days.

8. 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 in the subject and peer components that have been conducted, are being conducted, are planned, or are being planned by, or for, Fontaine. 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.

9. Provide copies of all documents related to the January 24, 2014 fatal crash in which a tractor equipped with the subject component was involved. Identify the current location of the specific subject fifth wheel and contact information for its custodian. Based on the latest information, provide Fontaine assessment of the fatal event as it relates to the alleged defect.
10. Provide a detailed chronology of all events regarding the alleged defect in the subject components starting from the time Fontaine first became aware of this issue to present. Describe how Fontaine first became aware of the alleged defect in the subject components and state the date on which Fontaine first became aware of the possibility of the alleged defect in the subject components. Include all information including dates of both internal and external meetings, meetings with fleets, manufacturers, or any others involved in this issue and discuss the resolution, planned action, and/or the manner in which Fontaine plans to address this issue. Also separately, provide a copy of any/all document(s) and presentation materials that were used during the meeting(s) whether Fontaine generated the document(s) or the document(s) were generated by others.
11. Produce the latest revision of the engineering drawings for each subject and peer component.
12. List all suppliers for materials used in the subject and peer components and provide the following information for each part called out on the engineering drawings. If multiple suppliers were used for specific materials, indicate the date range for each supplier:
  - a. Supplier company name and contact information;
  - b. Volume received by production month; and
  - c. Design requirements supplied by Fontaine.

13. Describe the quality assurance systems in place at each manufacturing location to ensure that the subject component has been properly assembled and is functioning correctly. If available, provide material receiving inspection records and manufacturing production inspection records.
14. If service parts are available for the subject and peer components, provide a count of parts sales by month for each item. Separate parts sales by supplier and revision if applicable.
15. Describe all modifications or changes made by, or on behalf of, Fontaine in the design, material composition, manufacture, quality control, supply, or installation of the subject and peer components, from the start of production to date, which relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect. 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;
  - b. A detailed description of the modification or change;
  - c. The reason(s) for the modification or change;
  - d. The part number(s) (service and engineering) of the original component;
  - e. The part number(s) (service and engineering) of the modified component;
  - f. Whether the original unmodified component 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.

Also, provide the above information for any modification or change that Fontaine is aware of which may be incorporated into vehicle production within the next 120 days.

16. Provide a list including contact information for the ten (10) fleets that purchase the largest quantity of subject and/or peer components.
17. Furnish Fontaine's assessment of the alleged defect in the subject vehicle, including:
  - a. The causal or contributory factor(s);
  - b. The failure mechanism(s);
  - c. The failure mode(s);
  - d. The risk to motor vehicle safety that it poses;
  - e. What warnings, if any, the operator and the other persons both inside and outside the vehicle would have that the alleged defect was occurring or subject component was malfunctioning; and
  - f. The reports included with this inquiry.

### **Legal Authority for This Request**

This letter is being sent to Fontaine 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.

### **Civil Penalties**

Fontaine's failure to respond promptly and fully to this letter could subject Fontaine 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.) The Vehicle Safety Act, as amended, 49 U.S.C. § 30165(b), provides for civil penalties of up to \$7,000 per day, with a maximum of \$17,350,000 for a related series of violations, for failing or refusing to perform an act required under 49 U.S.C. § 30166. See 49 CFR 578.6 (as amended by 77 Fed. Reg. 70710 (November 27, 2012)). This includes failing to respond completely to ODI information requests.

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

### **Confidential Business Information**

**All business confidential information must be submitted directly to the Office of Chief Counsel as described in the following paragraph and should not be sent to this office.** In addition, do not submit any business confidential information in the body of the letter submitted to this office. Please refer to PE15-023 in Fontaine's response to this letter and in any confidentiality request submitted to the Office of Chief Counsel.

If Fontaine 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, Fontaine must submit supporting information together with the materials that are the subject of the confidentiality request, in accordance with 49 CFR Part 512, as amended, to the Office of Chief Counsel (NCC-111), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room W41-227, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20590. Fontaine 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.** Please remember that the phrase "ENTIRE PAGE CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS INFORMATION" or "CONTAINS CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS INFORMATION" (as appropriate) must appear at the top of each page containing

information claimed to be confidential, and the information must be clearly identified in accordance with 49 CFR 512.6. If you submit a request for confidentiality for all or part of your response to this IR, that is in an electronic format (e.g., CD-ROM), your request and associated submission must conform to the new requirements in NHTSA's Confidential Business Information Rule regarding submissions in electronic formats. See 49 CFR 512.6(c) (as amended by 72 Fed. Reg. 59434 (October 19, 2007)).

If you have any questions regarding submission of a request for confidential treatment, contact Otto Matheke, Senior Attorney, Office of Chief Counsel at [otto.matheke@dot.gov](mailto:otto.matheke@dot.gov) or (202) 366-5253.

### **Due Date**

Fontaine's response to this letter, in duplicate, together with a copy of any confidentiality request, must be submitted to this office by **July 24, 2015**. If Fontaine finds that it is unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, Fontaine must request an extension from me at (202) 366-6938 no later than five business days before the response due date. If Fontaine 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 Fontaine then has available, even if an extension has been granted.

Please send email notification to Nate Seymour at [nate.seymour@dot.gov](mailto:nate.seymour@dot.gov) and to [ODI\\_IRresponse@dot.gov](mailto:ODI_IRresponse@dot.gov) when Fontaine sends its response to this office and indicate whether there is confidential information as part of Fontaine's response.

Prior to starting your response please call Nate Seymour of my staff at (202) 366-2069, to discuss this information request, or if you have any technical questions concerning this matter.

Sincerely,



*For* Bruce B. York, Chief  
Medium/Heavy Duty Vehicle Division  
Office of Defects Investigation

Supporting Documents: an email with attachments will be sent containing one Excel database template files and electronic copies of the subject reports referenced above in the second paragraph of this letter identified by the following ODI reference numbers: 10693551, 08V-084, 08V-164, 12V-535, 14V-321 and 15V-102.