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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 8, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR:

JIM CANNON

FROM:

JIM CONNOR 

SUBJECT:

Safety Brakes for Trucks

The attached article was returned in the President's outbox with the following notation:

"Look into"

Please follow-up with appropriate action.

cc: Don Rumsfeld

Attachment -

New York Times Article - 9/28/75

"Safety Brakes for Trucks - How Safe?!"

*answered
11/1/75 & sent to CFC*

Jim

This was sent to you

It says - "Look into"

Shouldn't it go to

Cannon?

Trudy

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, written over the word "Trudy". The signature is highly cursive and difficult to decipher, but appears to contain the letters "W/G" and "me".

*J. M. C. P. -
from P. -
had ind. -
D*

Safety Brakes for Trucks—How Safe?

Drivers Call Mandated System Dangerous

By JOHN BENDEL

Last January, after eight years of controversy, the Federal Government issued a regulation requiring certain brake systems for tractor-trailer trucks, the behemoths of the highway. Rather than ending the controversy, the new rule deepened it.

The new brakes are equipped with sensitive mini-computers called anti-lock devices. Evolved from aircraft technology, these devices prevent wheels from locking in panic stops by automatically releasing and reapplying the brakes in staccato fashion until the truck comes to a complete halt.

This equipment presumably allows much heavier, more powerful brakes on trucks than were formerly practical. Before anti-lock, heavy brakes would only have locked all a truck's wheels in sudden stops, making it as uncontrollable as a car trying to stop on ice. The combination of heavy brakes with anti-lock systems, though, can cut stopping distances almost in half while preventing skids and jackknives, according to the manufacturers.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration intended that the newly required brakes would lessen the number and severity of truck accidents. But truckers and some truck manufacturers charge that the new systems are costly, difficult to maintain, and, in fact, make trucks more dangerous to operate.

Four separate lawsuits have been brought seeking repeal of the regulation—including those by the American Trucking Associations and the Paccar Corporation, makers of Kenworth and Peterbilt trucks. The four have been consolidated into a single action before the United States Court of Appeals in San Francisco seeking an end to Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 121.

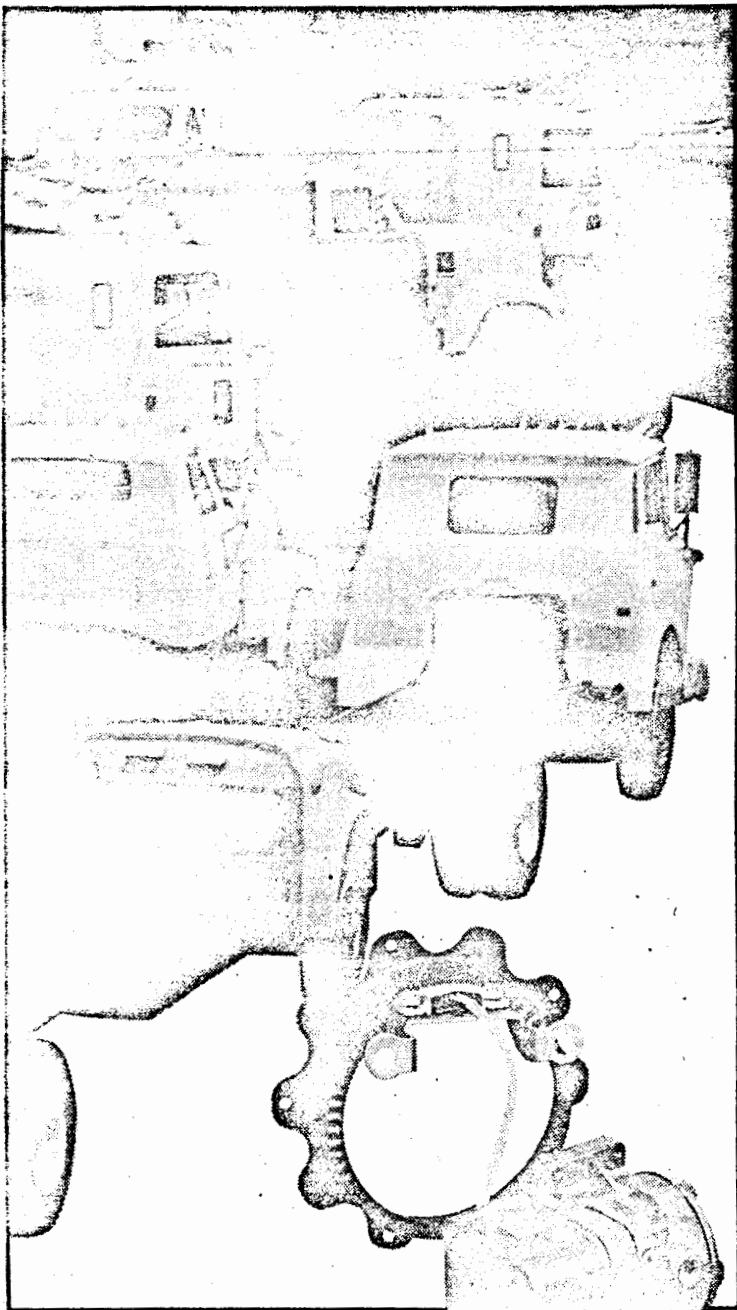
Among other things, the highway safety agency is charged with exceeding its statutory authority and using public highways as a testing ground for an unproved, highly complex system which by itself, according to the Council on Wage and Price Stability, will cost consumers as much as \$400-million a year over-all.

Meanwhile drivers around the country report serious problems with the brakes on newly purchased trucks.

A spokesman for the safety administration said, "We expected a groundswell of driver support once the anti-lock brakes went into service, but it doesn't seem to be working out that way."

Mason-Dixon Lines of Kingsport, Tenn., was one of the first of the large for-hire carriers to buy anti-lock brakes, equipping more than 200 new Mack Truck tractors. Drivers there are threatening to strike if brake problems aren't resolved by winter.

High on the list of their complaints is the erratic behavior of the brake system's warning lights for malfunction. Like the dashboard lights in cars that signal problems in water temperature and oil pressure, these



New trucks on the lot of the General Motors plant in Pontiac, Mich. New tractor-trailer models are equipped with anti-lock devices (inset) on brake systems. Circular speed sensor is attached to the wheel and mini-computer in box automatically controls braking action in fast stops.

Supporters of the highway safety administration claim that in winter driving, the benefits of the new brakes will become apparent. But one senior Mason-Dixon driver said, "The drivers I talk to just don't want to stick their necks out."

John King, president of Mason-Dixon, claims that the brake problems are minor. "This is the brake of the future," he said. "It may have been introduced prematurely, but it does what it is supposed to do. We may have overlooked driver training in the beginning, but we're working on that now."

Mr. King pointed out that there have been no accidents attributable to the brakes. Mr. Johnson of Paccar says if there is a problem with the system, it is not in the anti-lock device but in the

"It's not like a car," he explained. "When you stop quickly in a truck, you can have as much as 20 tons of cargo behind you that has to stop too. Something has to give. What if your freight happens to be spools of cable or rolls of printing paper? That stuff can roll right through the back of a trailer and crush the driver in the cab."

At the heart of Mason-Dixon's troubles is the fact that the new tractors can stop faster than the old trailers can, a situation that can lead to jackknifing. Since tractors normally outlast trailers, many fleets can expect to find themselves with a surplus of equipment.

A field test sponsored by the safety administration in November, 1969, supported the truckers' claim that the

of anti-lock brakes have ever been run above 35 miles per hour while truckers commonly travel at between 50 and 70 m.p.h.

Instead of high-speed testing, the administration has relied on computer simulations and engineering studies. But in the Mason-Dixon case, the agency is testing a tractor-trailer combination. So far, no results have been released.

The agency has troubles in other quarters to contend with, such as the embarrassment of possible brake system recalls. It has been found, for example, that the mini-computers in some of the systems are susceptible to interference from citizen's band radios, now very popular among truckers.

There is also a reluctance among the truckers to

production, meanwhile, has plummeted to about half of last year's level, leaving producers with other worries.

"Many of our members are deferring purchases to avoid this equipment and the problems that come with it," said John White, executive vice president of the Private Truck Council, representing over 1,000 corporate fleets, the biggest buyers so far of anti-lock brakes.

The council cites maintenance troubles that keep disproportionate numbers of the newly equipped trucks sidelined, and has recently called for the repeal of Standard 121.

"It would be a shame if we waited until these brakes killed someone before we did something about this situation," said Mr. White.

Further complicating the safety administration's position are claims by the Breeze Corporation of Union, N. J., that trucks equipped with an anti-jackknife device it manufactures meet the stopping requirements of Standard 121 without the complex anti-lock brakes. Breeze's device weighs and costs less than anti-lock brakes, but because of the wording of the standard cannot be used in complying.

Anti-lock brakes can run as high as \$3,000 for a tractor-trailer combination and Breeze has found few takers for a system that would have to be installed along with, rather than instead of, the anti-lock equipment.

"Truckers have told us they want to equip their trucks with our device," said George Green, Breeze's director of sales and an outspoken critic of Standard 121, "but they can't afford to as long as N.H.T.S.A. insists on anti-lock brakes too."

After years of appeals by Breeze, the safety administration has agreed to test the anti-jackknife device this week, with Congressional observers in attendance. If the Breeze device meets the claims made for it, some basic assumptions behind Standard 121 will be called into serious question.

Still, the safety administration and Standard 121 have many defenders, particularly among brake system manufacturers.

"People are trying to familiarize themselves with these systems," said Eaton's Mr. Johnston, "it's only the first year. It's a good regulation. It will contribute to highway safety. How can you measure the value of life against the cost of the systems?"

Noting that none of Eaton's products has yet been recalled, Mr. Johnston pointed out that the widely predicted catastrophic accidents had failed to materialize despite millions of service miles already logged.

Despite the outcry from Kingsport Local 549, the Teamsters is still a major supporter of Standard 121.

"Of course we're concerned with the problems of Local 549," said R. V. Durham, Teamster director of safety and health, "but we have confidence in the engineers over at N.H.T.S.A. The safety benefits of 121 far outweigh the problems we have had so far. If there are bugs in the systems, they will be gotten out."

But the future of Standard 121 probably lies on the highways with the drivers who will use the anti-lock brakes, and Local 549's Mr. Tennyson sounded his warning:

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The Motor Vehicle Safety Administration... required brakes would lessen the number and severity of truck accidents. But truckers and some truck manufacturers charge that the new systems are costly, difficult to maintain, and, in fact, make trucks more dangerous to operate.

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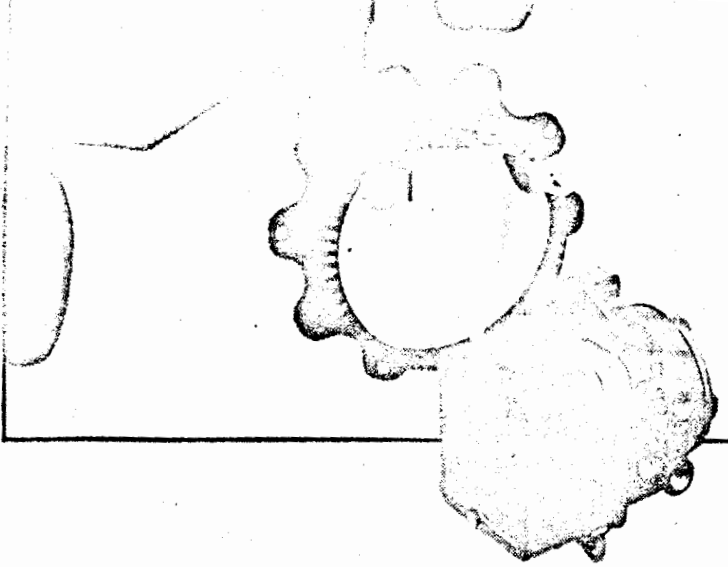
Drivers across the country report that the truck brake warning lights blink constantly, which can be distracting at night. Many drivers cover them with masking tape or chewing gum, and some bulbs have simply been removed.

But, warned Ray Johnston, field service manager for the Eaton Corporation, makers of the anti-lock system installed in Mason-Dixon's tractors, "Those lights are there for a reason and shouldn't be tampered with." Similar systems are manufactured by Bendix, Rockwell-Standard, Kelsey-Hayes, B. F. Goodrich and Wagner Electric, among others.

More than the warning lights, though, the Mason-Dixon drivers are concerned with the performance of the brakes themselves. They agree that the trucks stop more quickly, but stopping performances in some cases was hard to control, they say.

Some men found themselves catapulted into the steering wheel in short stops. A number of trucks have pulled hard to one side, then veered suddenly to the other, sometimes crossing entire lanes of traffic despite the drivers' best efforts to hold the wheel.

One man said he had had the wheel pulled from his grip altogether. Another, with more than 20 years experience on the road, said that for the first time in his life, he was afraid of the trucks he had to drive. Because the trucks entered the fleet in the spring, the Mason-Dixon men have not driven them on snow or ice-slicked roads yet.



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Mr. King pointed out that there have been no accidents attributable to the brakes. Mr. Johnson of Eaton says if there is a problem with the system, it is not in the anti-lock device but rather in the brakes themselves, which are made by a different company.

"The problem is not as great as the Mason-Dixon drivers would have you believe," said another close observer of the Mason-Dixon case. "They have been used to another type of truck altogether, and they're using this to make trouble for other reasons."

This view is also widely held at the safety administration according to sources within the agency.

Howard Tennyson, President of Teamster Local 549 in Kingsport, Tenn., disagrees. "If you ask me," he counters, "these brakes are a death trap. I drove one of those trucks and it went into a jackknife during a test stop. The brakes only worked on one side. It didn't happen every time, but how often does it have to?"

Mason-Dixon drivers interviewed at random almost universally back up Mr. Tennyson's contention.

"If you are in a curve," said one driver, "and you have to stop quickly, there's no way you can hold your lane. A truck driver has to be able to predict how his truck is going to perform. With these brakes, you just can't. When you stop quickly, you don't know where you're going to go."

"I'll tell you what's going to happen this winter," said another driver. "The grave yards will fill up and the man who invented these brakes should be the first one in the ground."

Beyond the computerized brakes, Mr. Tennyson claims, the concept of short stopping distances is too much too soon.

"It's not like a car," he explained. "When you stop quickly in a truck, you can have as much as 20 tons of cargo behind you that has to stop too. Something has to give. What if your freight happens to be spools of cable or rolls of printing paper? That stuff can roll right through the back of a trailer and crush the driver in the cab."

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There is also a reluctance among truckers to invest in new equipment until the questions about anti-lock devices are answered. Truck

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John Bendel, a writer, was formerly a truck driver.

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