



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad  
Administration**

# Memorandum

Date: June 15, 1998

Reply to Att. of: MP&E 98-53

Subject: Handbrake Chains

From: Edward R. English  
Director, Office of Safety Assurance and Compliance

To: Regional Administrators, Deputy Regional Administrators,  
Motive Power & Equipment Specialists and Inspectors

It has been brought to our attention that freight cars of recent construction are being equipped with handbrake chains that are not in compliance with Federal Railroad Administration regulations. Handbrake chains are described in the present Safety Appliance Standard Regulation, Section 231.27(a)(2)(vi), as follows:

All chains shall be not less than nine-sixteenths (9/16) inch BBB coil chain.

The Association of American Railroads (AAR) Manual of Standards S-404-74, 2.1.9, has the following requirements for handbrake chains:

Handbrake power chain shall be 9/16 inch BBB coil chain or meet the minimum specification (working load 5875 lbs., proof test of 11,750 lbs.) of sufficient length so that the distance from center line of lower attaching rivet hole in housing to center line clevis rivet is 21- 9/16 inches.

It has been determined that both the three-eighths (3/8) inch alloy chain and the 1/2 inch steel alloy chain currently being used by new car manufacturers exceeds the specifications for the 9/16 inch BBB coil chain.

Therefore, in accordance with 49 CFR 231.27 (a), **exception should not be taken** to handbrake chains that provide the same degree of safety, or a greater degree of safety, as the 9/16 inch BBB coil chain.

The 9/16 inch BBB coil chain is no longer being used by handbrake manufacturers.

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