

H.R. – VARIANCE Act

House Sponsors: Rep. Rick Crawford (AR-01) and Rep. Salud Carbahal (CA-24)

Background: Dry Bulk Truck Loads

- The issue primarily affects Tank Truckers, which make up only 3% of the trucking industry. These truckers carry a range of goods, including liquids (gasoline) and dry bulk (flour, grains).
- Only 2% of tank truckers of that original 3% of the larger trucking industry move dry bulk commodities.
- Present law limits the maximum laden weight of a commercial truck to 80,000 pounds, including the weight of cargo. Most trailers transporting dry bulk goods are tandem axle, limiting the weight for each axle to 34,000 pounds.
- At a weight station, according to the current statute, the weight needs to be “evenly” distributed among each of the axles. However, with dry bulk goods, the material moves around in the tank causing the weight on each axle of the vehicle to be different.
- Most trailers transporting dry bulk goods include plastic pellets, flour, aggregates, and other solid substances with tiny individual particles that make up the substance as a whole but easily separate.
- Bulk loads of dry goods rarely exceed the overall weight limits but they regularly shift during transport and cause the front trailer axle to exceed its maximum 34,000 pounds.
- The force generated when breaking compacts the cargo at the front end of the trailer but the relatively weaker forces from acceleration and forward movement fail to evenly redistribute the weight across axles. Even when the cargo is properly loaded, the truck’s natural motions cause the load to become improperly distributed.
- A 10% variance to individual axles would ensure that vehicles properly loaded with dry bulk goods remain within axle-weight limitations during transport.

VARIANCE ACT:

- This legislation would allow a 10% load shift variance on each axle’s weight as long as the overall weight of the tank truck does not exceed 80,000 pounds and is only carrying dry bulk goods.
- The load shift variance does not increase the maximum gross vehicle weight limit at 80,000 pounds, but rather would allow the maximum weight limit for tandem axles from 34,000 pounds to 37,400 pounds.
- During the 118th Congress, there were only two bipartisan amendments accepted in the House Version of the T&I reauthorization bill. This axle variance bill was one of those two amendments.