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AGRICULTURAL TOWING SAFETY CHAINS: MEET FEDERAL STANDARDS

House Bill 4323 as introduced First Analysis (3-3-99)

Sponsor: Rep. Terry Geiger
**Committee: Agriculture and Resource
Management**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Currently, under the Michigan Vehicle Code, a vehicle or trailer must be connected to a towing vehicle by suitable safety chains or devices, one on each side of the coupling and at the extreme outer edge of the vehicle or trailer, so that the towed or drawn vehicle or trailer does not deviate more than three inches to either side of the path of the towed vehicle. Each of the two connecting chains or devices must be strong enough to haul the vehicle or trailer when loaded.

Reportedly, farm equipment manufacturers have been coming out with newer, improved coupling devices built right into farm equipment that complies with federal motor carrier safety regulations. However, because the new coupling devices involve only a single chain, they technically are in violation of Michigan law. Legislation has been introduced that would bring Michigan law into compliance with federal motor carrier regulations with regard to safety coupling devices for towing farm equipment.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to make state law regarding towing of certain agricultural equipment conform with federal motor carrier safety regulations. More specifically, towed farm equipment ("implements of husbandry") weighing up to 10,000 pounds ("with a gross vehicle weight rating or a gross combination weight rating of up to 10,000 pounds") would be required to have safety chains or devices that conformed to federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

MCL 257.721

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill has no fiscal implications. (3-2-99)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Although the coupling devices that farm equipment manufacturers have developed reportedly is safer than older such devices, and although these newer coupling devices in fact meet federal motor carrier safety regulations, these devices technically are in violation of Michigan statutory requirements for safety coupling devices for towing farm equipment because they involve only a single chain instead of the double chains required under Michigan law. The bill would bring Michigan statutory requirements for such safety coupling devices into compliance with federal standards, thereby legalizing their use in Michigan.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Agribusiness Association supports the bill. (3-2-99)

The Michigan Farm Bureau supports the bill. (3-2-99)

The Department of State Police has no position on the bill. (3-2-99)

Analyst: S. Ekstrom

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.