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Tires the latest issue with Chinese Imports

A lawsuit prompted by a fatal accident on the Blue Route contends that the tires were simply not made correctly.

By *Chris Mondics* INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

A lawyer whose Philadelphia clients allege in a lawsuit that faulty Chinese-made tires caused a fatal car crash last year says millions of suspect tires may have been sold in the United States, far more than initial estimates.

The crash was one of at least two that led to a recall of the tires, and the latest in a string of alerts about the safety of products manufactured in China.

Jeffrey Killino filed suit on behalf of several Philadelphia families in May in Common Pleas Court against Foreign Tire Sales, a North Jersey tire distributor, alleging that its Chinese-made tires caused a crash in August that claimed the lives of two Philadelphia construction workers and severely injured another.

The federal government has demanded the recall of 450,000 tires made by the Chinese firm Hangzhou Zhongce Rubber Co. that FTS distributed in the United States.

But Killino, 33, said that his firm, Woloshin & Killino of Philadelphia, has learned that there are a half-dozen or more other distributors of Zhongce tires and that as many as five million may have been sold in the United States since 2002.

"This manufacturer sold tires under countless brand names," Killino said. "It doesn't seem reasonable to assume" that the problem is limited to the recalled tires.

The lawsuit is the result of an acci-

dent last August in the southbound lanes of the Blue Route in which a 2000 Chevrolet Cargo Van carrying four construction workers home from a job in the Poconos blew a tire. The vehicle rolled over, ejecting three of the four. Two were killed, and the other suffered severe brain damage.

Families of the victims contacted Killino, who said his own investigation found that failure of the manufacturer to place adhesive strips between the tire belts caused the tires to degrade and eventually separate, resulting in the crash.

The tires were sold under the names of Compass, Telluride, Westlake and YKS.

"We are getting calls from people all around the country; they say: 'I had these tires, and I had a blowout,'" Killino said.

Shortly after he filed the suit in May, FTS contacted the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to report that it, too, had safety concerns about the tires triggered by the crash of an ambulance in New Mexico in 2005.

FTS launched its own tests of the tire as a result of the crash and a flurry of complaints from customers seeking refunds on their tire purchases because of poor quality. The company has said that its own tests have shown that some tires, designed to last 40,000 miles, actually were coming apart after only 25,000 miles. The tires were made

for vans and other light trucks.

It was the FTS filing that prompted the federal government to demand a recall.

Since then, Killino also has filed a suit in federal district court in New Jersey against Zhongce, FTS and other distributors; he is seeking class-action status.

For its part, FTS has sued Zhongce in federal court, alleging that it is responsible.

The Chinese government has aggressively defended the products, attributing the complaints to competitors in the United States seeking to protect their own sales.

Killino said that, in addition to lacking adhesive strips, the Zhongce tires were dangerous because their inner liners were too thin, permitting air to leak and damage the outer walls of the tires.

He said he also has asked Zhongce to disclose all sales involving tires that were manufactured without the adhesive strip needed to prevent separation.

Chinese-made products have come under intensive scrutiny this year. U.S. authorities have banned or recalled pet food and fish, children's toys and other products deemed defective.

Contact staff writer Chris Mondics at 215-854-5957 or cmondics@phillynews.com.

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