

FIRESTONE/FORD FIASCO

TIME LINE & INTERNAL DOCUMENTS¹

1978

Firestone recalled 14.5 million of the Firestone 500 series tires after reports of accidents and deaths due to tread separation on steel belted radial tires.

1988

Bridgestone, the world's No. 3 tire maker, acquired Firestone, the No. 2 tire maker. The takeover rescued Firestone from potential financial collapse due to the 1978 recall.

1989

Firestone works to design the tires that will be used as Original Equipment (OE) on the Explorer when Ford starts production in 1990.

Arvin/Calspan Tire Research Facility of Alexandria, Va., an independent research lab hired by Ford, measured the performance of 17 Firestone tires. The lab reported 3 belt-edge separation failures of the 17 tires tested.

9/11/89 E-mail discussing Explorer's performance with different tires in stability tests. "We may be the only kid on the block that can't pass the CU test." (*See Appendix A*)

9/12/89 Internal Ford email - Roger Stornant expresses concern that the UN46 [Explorer] would fail Consumers Union tests with P235 tires. "Based on the variability of the test, as demonstrated by our own drivers, it is possible to pass the CU test with the P235 tires; however, if we were using the CU test as sign-off requirement, we would not accept this combination (P235 ATX & 2dr).

In internal Ford email to Charles White, Roger Stornant states, "[...] Concern has been expressed that we will be the only OEM with a vehicle that has a significant chance of failing the CU test. I believe that management is aware of the potential risk w/P235 tires and has accepted risk. CU test is generally unrepresentative of real world and I see no real risk in failing except what may result in wave of spurious litigation." (*See Appendix B*)

1990

The Explorer was introduced as a 1991 model. The Firestone 15" ATX tire is original equipment when the vehicle is shipped to dealers.

1991

Bridgestone/Firestone ATX, ATX II, and Wilderness AT tires became original equipment for the Ford Explorer (1991-2000), Ford Ranger (1991-2000), F-150 truck (1991-1994), Mercury Mountaineer (1996-2000), Mazda Navajo (1991-1994) and B-Series Pick-up (1994-2000). Eventually, over 14.4 million tires would be manufactured.

12/19/91 Firestone memo to Ford, "it is increasingly important that we know whether you will adopt the tire for the Explorer." (*See Appendix C*)

1992

Bridgestone/Firestone began investigating allegations of safety problems with its tires. Ford began receiving complaints regarding Firestone tires on its light truck models.

State Farm Insurance, the largest insurer of autos in the U.S., establishes its liaison office with National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA).

8/27/92 Memo from J.E. Behr of Firestone to R.D. Bacigalupi, responding to questions raised by Ford concerning the design of the ATX. (*See Appendix D*)

12/26/92 **Carrie Ann Blackaller - injured, and witness to the deaths of her husband, Donald Larry Blackaller, and son, Robert Lawrence Blackaller. CALIFORNIA** (*See Reference 1*)

1994

Union workers at the Firestone Decatur, IL plant went out on strike. Firestone used replacement workers during this period to continue production. The strike lasts until December 1996.

6/10/94 **Jim Bob Dickson, husband of Anna Irene Dickson - killed. OKLAHOMA**
In a separate incident the same day: Cody Ellis, 6-year old son of April and Gary Ellis - killed. OKLAHOMA (*See Reference 2*)

8/30/94 **Michele Woolley Angeles, 35 year old wife of Jesus Angeles - killed while delivering food to an orphanage. ARIZONA** (*See Reference 3*)

1995

Firestone 15" ATX II tires begin production. They replace the 15" ATX as OE on the Ford Explorer.

Ford begins process for production of Explorers in Venezuela.

January - Firestone hires 943 workers needed to work at the Decatur, IL plant.

1/4/95 **James Christopher Combs - killed. KENTUCKY** (*See Reference 4*)

4/30/95 **Susie Rogers, wife of Bill Rogers and mother of four - killed. TEXAS**
PROTECTIVE ORDER ISSUED (*See Reference 5*)

5/17/95 Lilly Mae Guara, wife of Arthur Guara - killed. COLORADO (See Reference 6)

1996

February - Ford Venezuela begins production of Ford Explorers. During the first five months of production Ford imports 3,010 15" ATX II tires from Firestone's Decatur plant. By June 18th, Firestone Venezuela begins production of 15" ATX II tires for Explorers produced in Venezuela.

December - Striking unions return to work at the Firestone plants.

5/16/96 Juan C. Carrillo, Sr., father of Juan Carrillo, Jr. and Alexandro Carrillo - killed. NEVADA (See Reference 7)

**6/2/96 Christopher Kehm - injured. FLORIDA
PROTECTIVE ORDER ISSUED (See Reference 8)**

6/17/96 Stephen Gauvain, 51-year old TV reporter and husband of Jan Gauvain - killed. TEXAS (See Reference 9)

10/3/96 Adam Scott Huffman, husband of Cynthia Silva and father of Jordan Huffman - killed. TEXAS (See Reference 10)

10/7/96 Firestone audit of Wilderness AT tires, at Decatur, IL plant, reports tire failure at high speed testing. (See Appendix E)

12/4/96 Malaquias Ortiz - killed. CALIFORNIA (See Reference 11)

1997

**1997 Orestes and Evelyn Alvarez - injured. FLORIDA
PROTECTIVE ORDER ISSUED (the plaintiffs' lawyer was ordered by the judge to agree to the order. One year later the order was lifted by another Judge after the intervention of the Florida Attorney General.) (See Reference 12)**

**3/9/97 Daniel Van Etten, 19-year old son of Michael and Kim Van Etten and a freshman on a full football scholarship at the University of West Virginia - killed. GEORGIA
SETTLEMENT CONFIDENTIAL (See Reference 13)**

6/10/97 Cynthia Jackson - witnessed the death of her husband, C.J. Jackson, and sustained injuries leading to the amputation of both her legs. TEXAS (See Reference 14)

8/2/97 Francisca Gutierrez, 36-year old wife of Jose Gutierrez, - killed while holding two-month old Emily Olvera, who survived. TENNESSEE (See Reference 15)

8/4/97 James Haffey, husband of Barbara Haffey and father of 3 - killed. MISSISSIPPI (See Reference 16)

8/19/97 Jose Juan Menendez and Clotilde Menendez, parents of Jose Menendez and Merida Monteagudo - killed. FLORIDA (See Reference 17)

9/18/97 Timothy Lockwood, son of Gail Lockwood - suffocated to death after breaking neck in rollover. TEXAS (See Reference 18)

1998

July - State Farm Insurance research analyst Sam Boyden sent an e-mail to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) reporting 21 tread separation cases involving the Firestone ATX tire. Boyden continued to send e-mails to NHTSA about subsequent Firestone tread separation accidents.

October - Ford noted tread separation problems on Ford Explorers in Venezuela, and sent samples to Bridgestone/Firestone for analysis. A Ford affiliated dealer in Saudi Arabia wrote to Ford Motor Co. complaining of problems with Firestone tires.

**1/12/98 Matthew Hendricks, 18-year old son of Joe and Vicki Hendricks - killed on his way to pick up his girlfriend to go bowling. TEXAS
*SETTLEMENT CONFIDENTIAL (See Reference 19)***

6/19/98 Brittany Whiteside, minor child of Cartinia Bivens - killed. ALABAMA (See Reference 20)

7/22/98 State Farm Associate Research Administrator Samuel Boyden advises William Duckwitz at NHTSA of 21 Firestone ATX P235/75R15 tire failures which caused injuries. (See Appendix F)

8/8/98 Noriyuki Aoyagi, son of Kinsaku and Asako Aoyagi - killed. CALIFORNIA (See Reference 21)

10/16/98 Jessica LeAnn Taylor, 14-year old cheerleader and daughter of Cathy and Jim Taylor - killed on her way to a Homecoming pep rally. TEXAS (See Reference 22)

10/24/98 Ford Saudi Dealer Letter to Firestone expressing safety concerns with tires. "Do we have to have a fatality before any action is taken on this issue?" (See Appendix G)

1999

After a Ford salesman in Saudi Arabia receives reports of tread separations on Ford Explorers, a Dearborn team is established to analyze the problem and along with representatives of Firestone, goes to Saudi Arabia to study the circumstances surrounding the tire failures.

1/28/99 Internal Ford E-mail. "I'm recommending that we make our own analysis of the tires from the market to protect ourselves and give our dealers and customers an independent opinion of this issue." (See Appendix H)

2/14/99 Ford Saudi Dealer Letter to Firestone. "It appears to be increasingly obvious that there exists an inherent problem in the bonding of the thread to the casing." (See Appendix I)

3/11/99 Letter to Ford Confirming Acceptability of P255/70R16 AT Tires for the Explorer in the U.S. (See Appendix J)

March 11, 1999

Ford memorandum noted that Ford and Bridgestone/Firestone executives discussed notifying U.S. safety authorities about a planned tire recall in Saudi Arabia. Ford decided to replace the tires overseas without telling federal regulators.

3/11/99 Internal Ford Correspondence re: Middle East Explorer/Tire Problems. (*See Appendix K*)

3/20/99 **Gloria Jimenez - injured, and witness to the death of her daughter, Denise Jimenez, and the infliction of serious injuries on her other daughter, Melissa Jimenez. TEXAS**

PROTECTIVE ORDER ISSUED (*See Reference 23*)

April 1999

NHTSA's Uniform Tire Grading Report gave Firestone ATX II and Wilderness AT tires the lowest grade on stress test temperature. The overwhelming majority of comparable tires received higher grades. It is believed that overheated tires lead to tread separation.

4/28/99 Internal Ford Summary of Middle East Explorer/Tire Problems - says Ford will "address the issues related to the rollovers on a case-by-case basis." (*See Appendix L*)

5/4/99 Ford Saudi Dealer Memo to Ford re: Middle East Tire Problems - Fax from Arabian Car Marketing advises Ford Middle East that Firestone tires are going to be replaced with Michelin tires. (*See Appendix M*)

5/19/99 E-mail discussing the tire problem in Venezuela, how fast customers drive in Venezuela, and inadequacy of testing. (*See Appendix N*)

5/30/99 **Nidia Ann Leal, mother of Ryan Anthony Guillen and Kimberly Guillen, and Patricio Leal - killed. TEXAS** (*See Reference 24*)

6/99 E-mails regarding tires for export to the Middle East and heat-related concerns. (*See Appendix O*)

6/4/99 **Kelli Gilmore, wife of John Gilmore - killed while driving with her two sons, John and Sean. TEXAS** (*See Reference 25*)

July 1999

Ford replaces Firestone 16" Wilderness AT tires in the Middle East with Goodyear 16" tires. Ford changes the tires on 6,768 vehicles at their own expense. Firestone tells Ford that they believe there is nothing wrong with the tires and no change is required.

7/8/99 1996/97 Explorer/Mountaineer P255/70R16 Tire Separation in Gulf Coast Countries (GCC) and Malaysia. (*See Appendix P*)

August 1999

Ford began replacing Firestone tires on Explorers sold in Saudi Arabia after reports of tread separation problems. Ford did not report the safety concerns, but called the replacement program a "customer notification enhancement action."

- 8/9/99** Internal Memo re: Venezuela Tire Survey. (*See Appendix Q*)
- 8/12/99** E-mails regarding the tire problems on Explorers in Venezuela. (*See Appendix R*)
- 8/24/99** Firestone letter to Ford regarding the investigation of Wilderness tire sizes P235/75R15 and P255/70R16 (included is the Venezuela Tire Survey for August 2-5, 1999) (*See Appendix S*)

September - October 1999

Ford began replacing Firestone tires on Explorers in ten Middle East countries.

- 9/99** **Peggy Turner Trahan - seriously injured. TEXAS**
PROTECTIVE ORDER ISSUED (*See Reference 26*)
- 9/17/99** Internal Ford E-mail re: Explorer Tire Problems in Asia. (*See Appendix T*)
- 10/99** **Medhat Labib - lost his wife, son, and the use of his legs. FLORIDA** (*See Reference 27*)
- 10/13/99** Internal Ford Memos re: Firestone Explorer Export Tire. (*See Appendix U*)

November 1999

In response to the tire separation incidents in Saudi Arabia, Ford requests Firestone to test tires mounted on Ford Explorers in the U.S. Firestone experts examine 243 high-mileage tires, but are unable to detect a problem among the sample of tires tested.

December 1999

It is discovered in a Firestone audit in Venezuela that mislabeled tires are being manufactured at that plant.

- 12/13/00** **Cam Webb, 31-year old husband and father of 3 - killed. FLORIDA** (*See Reference 27*)

2000

Internal documents showed Firestone executives knew about rising warranty costs due to accidents caused by the ATX, ATX II and the Wilderness AT tires.

February 2000

After a Houston, Texas TV station KHOU does a story on tread separation of Firestone tires used on Ford Explorers consumers start reporting to NHTSA complaints with tread separations on Firestone tires.

- 2/3/00** Ford Critical Concerns Review Group (North America) Summary of Foreign Tire Problems. (*See Appendix V*)

February 16, 2000

Due to reports similar to those in Saudi Arabia, Ford replaces Firestone ST6 tires at their own expense with Goodyear tires on 316 vehicles in Malaysia and Taiwan. Firestone once again informs Ford that they believe there is nothing wrong with the tires and that no change is required.

May 2000

Ford changed Explorer's standard equipment to Goodyear tires in Venezuela while waiting for Firestone to come to resolution regarding the tire separation problems. Ford recalled Firestone tires in Malaysia, Thailand, Colombia, and Ecuador. The entire overseas recall reached 46,912 SUVs.

NHTSA launched a formal investigation into the tread separation cases involving the Firestone ATX and Wilderness tires.

- 5/4/00 Letter to President, Ford of Venezuela, from Firestone saying that Firestone will fit new tires on Ford Explorers "on which the suspension has been modified." (*See Appendix W*)
- 5/9/00 Memo from Firestone Venezuelan executive summarizing the meeting with Ford officials regarding the tire problems in Venezuela. (*See Appendix X*)
- 5/9/00 Memo from legal dept. summarizing the meeting between Firestone and Ford regarding the situation in Venezuela. (*See Appendix Y*)

June 8, 2000

Ford requests that Firestone provide all information that they gave to NHTSA, including claims data from Firestone on the 15" ATX and ATX II, 15" Wilderness AT, and 16" Wilderness AT tires.

- 6/8/00 Firestone Wilderness AT Tire/Venezuela/Colombia & Ecuador Problem Investigation/Verification Data. (*See Appendix Z*)

July, 2000

- 7/3/00 **Reverend Bill Touchton, husband of Gail Touchton and preacher at Wingate Baptist Church - killed. FLORIDA** (*See Reference 28*)
- 7/28/00 Ford receives Firestone's information sent to NHTSA, including the claims data.

August 4, 2000

Ford finds a pattern in the data pointing to the 15" ATX, ATX II and Wilderness AT tires made at the Decatur, IL plant and called in the Firestone experts. They found that older tires produced late in each production year from 1994-1996 had a higher failure rate.

August 8

Firestone and Ford contact NHTSA on the need for a tire recall.

August 9

Bridgestone/Firestone announced a region by region recall of more than 6.5 million AT, ATX II and Wilderness AT tires. Approximately 2 million Ford Explorers were named as subjects of the recall. The cost estimate for the recall ranged from \$300 to \$600 million. The hot weather regions were scheduled for tire replacement first, with other regions to follow. NHTSA reports that Firestone tire separations were responsible for 46 deaths.

August 10

Plaintiff attorneys involved with Firestone litigation over the past decade note they know of 107 related tire cases, with 90 of those having a direct link to the recalled tires.

August 10

Ford claimed it became aware of the tire separation problem one year ago, from anecdotal reports from Saudi Arabia.

August 11

Rep. John Dingell sends a letter to Mr. Masatoshi Ono, Chairman and CEO, Bridgestone/Firestone Inc., asking Firestone to reimburse consumers who replace their recalled tires with other name brands.

August 16

NHTSA increased the number of deaths connected to the Firestone tread separations to 62.

August 17

Firestone agrees to reimburse consumers who replace their recalled tires with a competitor's tires.

August 21

Ford announces that it is suspending production of the Explorer at three of its plants so as to free up 70,000 tires for the recall.

August 22

Firestone announces that it will be airlifting tires from Japan to assist in the recall.

August 24

Committee investigators meet with NHTSA for the first time.

8/25/00 Washington Post Article on Secretary Slater's Comments re: State Farm Warnings.
(See Appendix AA)

August 30

NHTSA and Firestone meet to discuss NHTSA's concerns of tread separation found in other tires produced by Firestone not under recall.

August 31

After Firestone reviews NHTSA's data on tread separation on other Firestone tires, they inform NHTSA that they do not believe that a recall is needed.

September 1, 2000

NHTSA announced another 24 Firestone tire models showed rates of tread separation exceeding those of the recalled tires. NHTSA also increased the estimate of deaths attributed to Firestone tires from 62 to 88. Venezuelan authorities report that at least 47 people died because of the Firestone tires.

September 4

Firestone announces the recall of 15" and 16" Wilderness AT tires produced in Venezuela. (There are 62,000 tires in this universe.) Firestone's decision to recall comes after a weekend of negotiations with INDECU.

September 6 -- Commerce Committee hearing is scheduled.

1. Sources of information include:

<http://com-notes.house.gov/tabs/index.html> (House hearings - documents for the record;

http://www.house.gov/commerce_democrats/tirerecall/summ.htm;

<http://www.citizen.org/fireweb/index7.htm> (Public Citizen - Chronology of Firestone/Ford)