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Automotive News

Takata, automakers to face airbag product-liability cases in Florida court

Automotive News | February 6, 2015 - 1:33 pm EST

-- **UPDATED: 2/6/15 4:02 pm ET**

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- Dozens of lawsuits against Takata Corp. and several car manufacturers over faulty airbags that prompted a wave of recalls will be heard in a Florida federal court, a judicial panel has ruled.

U.S. District Judge Frederico Moreno in the Southern District of Florida will preside over the cases, according to a ruling Thursday from the U.S. Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation. The panel considers requests to consolidate related lawsuits in U.S. federal courts.

More than 70 proposed class actions have been filed in the past few months by customers who say Takata airbags are defective and can violently explode and spray metal debris, putting passengers at risk of injury or death.

Some of the lawsuits name as defendants several automakers, including Honda Motor Co., BMW, Ford Motor Co., Nissan Motor Corp., Subaru and Toyota Motor Corp.

The lawsuits claim Takata and the automakers knew about the airbag problems for years but until recently failed to recall the cars or warn customers and safety regulators.

Plaintiffs are seeking economic damages, such as lost resale value. There are also at least 10 state and federal personal-injury lawsuits involving the airbags.

Takata's airbag inflators have been found to explode too forcefully, and the problem has prompted automakers to recall nearly 25 million vehicles worldwide since 2008. The airbags have also been linked to six deaths, all in Honda cars.

Plaintiffs' lawyers, Takata and the automakers had all agreed that the cases should be consolidated to coordinate pre-trial proceedings but disagreed on the venue.

Many of the plaintiffs supported Florida, while Takata and six automakers had asked to move the cases to Pittsburgh, which they said was more centrally located.

Honda said in a statement that it respected the panel's decision and looked forward to proceedings before the Miami court.

A lead plaintiffs' lawyer who moved to transfer the cases to Florida and several of the car companies were not immediately available. Takata, Ford and Subaru declined to comment.



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