

WEATHER

Today: Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
High: 90s. Low: 70s.

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Firms negligent

Sizeable award goes to wife, son, parents of man killed in tire case

By **MELISSA RENTERIA**
THE ENTERPRISE

ORANGE — An Orange County jury has awarded a Bryan family more than \$29 million in damages for a family member's death it said was caused by a defective and improperly repaired tire.

The wrongful death lawsuit against Sears Roebuck & Company and Bridgestone/Firestone was filed by the family of Terry Tripp of Bryan, who died from injuries sustained in a car accident Sept. 25, 2000.

The jury reached its verdict late Wednesday in Judge Pat Clark's 128th District Court.

It was the first jury verdict reached in a case involving a Bridgestone/Firestone tire since the Firestone recall in 2000, said plaintiffs' attorney Richard Mithoff of Houston. The tire in question was not the same model as those recalled because of widely reported separation problems.

The jury assessed 35 percent of the damages against Sears Roebuck & Company, which sold and later repaired the tire, and 65 percent against Bridgestone/Firestone, the tire maker.

The tire was sold and repaired at a Sears store in Bryan.

The lawsuit was filed by Tripp's wife, Christine, and the couple's four-year-old son, Thomas, along with Tripp's parents, Leland and Bernadine Tripp.

The jury awarded \$23 million to Tripp's wife and son and \$6 million to his parents after deliberating a day and a half.

The family alleged that Sears was negligent in not properly repairing the tire in April 1998 after Tripp purchased it there in 1997. The family also alleged that Bridgestone/Firestone was negligent in the tire's design and construction.

Tripp, who was 35 when he died, was on his way to a hunting trip when the tread

on his vehicle's left rear tire separated, causing his 1993 Chevrolet Blazer to go off the road and roll over in Williamson County, just outside Austin.

Tripp died from severe head and chest injuries.

Tripp's blazer was equipped with Bridgestone/Firestone Dueler APT tires, which were not included in the 2000 recall of Firestone tires, Mithoff said.

"This jury is clearly sending a signal to Bridgestone/Firestone and Sears to give serious consideration to recalling these tires," Mithoff said, adding the Tripp family hopes the verdict will lead to the tire's recall.

Messages late Wednesday seeking comment from Sears' attorney, Lou Lehr of Chicago, were not returned in time for publication deadline.

Bridgestone/Firestone reached a confidential settlement with Tripp's family before the trial began June 25.

Attorneys for Bridgestone/Firestone did not attend the trial.

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