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FIRESTONE FINED \$500,000 FOR TIRE SAFETY VIOLATION

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. has agreed to pay \$500,000 in civil penalties for violations of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced today. It is the largest civil penalty ever assessed under the Safety Act.

The case involved non-compliance investigations conducted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration on Firestone 500 steel belted radial tires and a related tire line made by Firestone and marketed under the "Primero" brand name.

NHTSA found that 400,000 of the company's "500" radials, sizes HR78-14 and HR78-15 and 5,000 Primero tires, size GR78-15, were improperly manufactured and did not comply with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 109, New Pneumatic Tires. The tires in question failed to meet the high speed requirement of the standard.

The tires, produced in 1973 and 1974, were recalled by Firestone in early 1977.

In 1978, as a result of another investigation by NHTSA, Firestone agreed to recall approximately 14 million steel belted radial 500 and steel belted radial TPC tires, the largest tire recall in history. Those tires initially were determined to contain a safety-related defect. The Safety Act requires manufacturers to recall such defective automotive products regardless of whether they meet specific standards established by the safety agency.

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The tires which are the subject of the civil penalty announced today are from the same Firestone tire lines as those covered by the defect recall, but were found earlier by NHTSA to be in non-compliance with the standard.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "Our investigation showed that Firestone learned that these tires were likely to fail the standard before our testing revealed it, but the company did not notify us and recall the tires. It is appropriate that they pay a substantial penalty in this case."

The largest previous civil penalty was assessed against General Motors, which paid a \$400,000 fine in 1978 for refusing a government order to notify owners of a safety-related defect in certain GM vehicles equipped with Rochester Quadrajets carburetors with faulty carburetor plugs.

