

Fatal Rollover Prompts Probe into Chinese-Made Tire Valve Stems Safety Groups Urge Consumers to Have Tires Checked

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ORLANDO, FLA -- Safety advocates are urging motorists to inspect their valve stems for cracks and to check their tire pressure in the wake of one distributor's recall of defective valve stems made in China by Shanghai Baolong Industries Co. and a federal probe into premature cracking prompted by a fatal rollover crash.

As many as 30 million replacement rubber valves stems, imported to the U.S. from China beginning in August 2006, can crack prematurely, causing tires to lose air. Air loss at highway speeds may result in a tire failure and loss-of-control crash. (The valve stem is a rubber tube with a metal valve used to inflate the tire with air.)

On November 11, Robert Monk of Orlando, Fla. died when the right rear tire of his 1998 Ford Explorer failed, triggering a rollover crash. The tire failure has been linked to a cracked a Dill TR413 valve stem manufactured by Topseal, a subsidiary of Shanghai Baolong Industries Co., Ltd for Dill Air Control Products, LLC. In March, the Monk family filed suit against Dill Air Control Products, alleging that the defective tire valve stem caused the crash.

"The Monk family wants to get the message out there to ensure that no one else is hurt," said Attorney Richard Newsome, of the Newsome Law Firm in Orlando, Fla., who represents Robert Monk's survivors.

Auto safety consultant Sean Kane advises any motorist who has had a tire replaced after July 2006, to immediately have their valves inspected for signs of cracking.

"Radial tires do not show signs of underinflation by a visual inspection until they are significantly underinflated, at which point the tire may have sustained irreparable damage. Motorists may not realize that they are driving on tires that are underinflated and overloaded," Kane said. "The only way to tell if you have a valve stem made by this company is to dismount the tire from the wheel to examine it from the inside. Once they are out of the box, and on a vehicle there is no tracking for these products so you can't notify owners. If you're not checking tires pressure regularly, now is the time to get into the habit."

In April, after receiving notice of the Monk crash, Dill officials met with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to discuss the problem. On May 2, Dill sent a Technical Bulletin to major tire retailers advising them that the company had received complaints of surface cracks appearing on the outside of the rubber near the rim hole in several models: TR 413, TR 413 chrome, TR 414, and TR 418 Dill ACP valve stems.

“When the rubber is exposed to high levels of ozone as it is being stressed, surface cracks can appear. High speeds and an unsupportive rim profile allow the rubber valve to flex at a greater angle and may cause these cracks to propagate, leading to a slow leak of air,” the bulletin said.

Dill officials told NHTSA that valves, manufactured from July 2006 to November 2006, may leak from cracks caused by ozone exposure. NHTSA opened a formal investigation on May 15.

On June 2, Tech International, a distributor of Shanghai Baolong-made replacement tire valve stems, announced a recall of 6 million TR413 valve stems, offering free replacements and compensation for any tire damage caused by the defective part. According to their recall letter “Tech International does not know the identity of any end-users of the TR413 valves and has no realistic method of determining the identity of such individuals. Furthermore, there is no realistic method for Tech International to identify the production dates of any specific TR413 valves.”

The problem, says Kane, is that the parts are untraceable once they are fitted to vehicles and worse, these companies haven’t alerted the public of impending danger. Dill Air Control Products, LLC located in North Carolina, has only notified its customers to inspect their inventory for the suspect lots and recommended “out of an abundance of caution” that tire retailers inspect the valve stems on vehicles that received replacements between September 2006 and June 2007 if they return for service.

“It’s not an abundance of caution to wait for customers to return to retailers to inspect for defective valves” Newsome says. “An abundance of caution would have Dill alerting the public who bought tires after August 2006 that they need to have their valves inspected and to pay close attention to tire inflation pressure to prevent further tragedies.”

Motorists should report valve stem failures to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration <http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivoq/> or 888-327-4236

For more information on valve stem failures visit www.newsomelaw.com and www.safetyresearch.net