



DaimlerChrysler Settles Suit Of Exploding Jeep Grand Cherokee Yet Makes No Design Changes To Remedy Problem

July 30th, 2002 (WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.) - Kenneth Smith's life changed in a mere blink of an eye on the morning of October 6, 2001. As his 1995 Jeep Grand Cherokee began traveling through an intersection with a green light his vehicle was rear-ended by a Lincoln Town Car. Immediately upon impact the Jeep burst into flames. Smith, a resident of Jacksonville, Florida, suffered burns to his abdomen, right hand and arm. He has undergone two skin grafts, and must wear special garments to protect his arm and hand.

Ken Smith was unaware, as are probably countless other individuals, that the 1995 Jeep Grand Cherokee (as well as the current models of the Grand Cherokee and Jeep Liberty) was unsafe because the fuel tank and filler neck was designed and installed in a location that is susceptible to rupture or puncture in a rear-end collision. In an accident the Jeep's fuel tank will often times rupture and allow gasoline to escape. This almost always presents a high risk of fire and explosion, which will lead to severe injury or death to the vehicle's occupants.

"This vehicle was a virtual time bomb poised to explode," said attorney, Ted Leopold, of Ricci~Leopold, P.A. , West Palm Beach. "The fuel tank of the 1995 model was located behind the rear axle. This puts the tank in a position that leaves it vulnerable to explosion if impacted by another vehicle. DaimlerChrysler could have located the fuel tank forward of the rear axle, as almost all of its competitors do. This would have provided greater protection to the fuel tank, and the occupants of the vehicle in the event of a rear impact collision. If nothing else the company should have at least provided a shield that would protect the fuel tank from rupture."

Today, Ken Smith is making great progress in his recovery from this horrendous accident. Ironically, one would think that the car that hit the back of Smith's Jeep, was

traveling at a high rate of speed. It was not! The vehicle was traveling 20-25 miles per hour at the time of impact.

DaimlerChrysler, settled with Smith for an undisclosed sum of money. However, this was no victory for consumers. Today, anyone can walk on to a DaimlerChrysler lot and purchase a new Grand Cherokee or Jeep Liberty and be at risk for this same type explosion. The fuel tank remains in a location that is susceptible to rupture, puncture or other damage that could cause a failure and allow fuel to escape. In addition, the fuel tank was designed with material that is susceptible to rupture and the fuel filler neck of the Jeeps are routed in such a way that they are susceptible to being torn away, pulled off, punctured or damaged in the event of an accident.

"Justice for Ken Smith was our first order of business in this case," said Leopold. "However, I am disappointed and horrified to see that DaimlerChrysler continues to manufacture these vehicles in this manner. Sadly, we are bound to see many more children and adults riding in these vehicles who will undoubtedly suffer severe burn injuries and even death from horrific car fires."

Founded in 1982, Ricci~Leopold, P.A., has built a reputation as one of the most successful personal injury law firms in the Southeast. The firm represents individuals who have been wrongfully injured in matters involving automotive crashworthiness, managed care litigation, insurance bad faith and coverage disputes, and personal injury. Ricci~Leopold, P.A. headquartered in West Palm Beach, Florida, has seven attorneys representing clients as well as an experienced and skilled research and investigative staff. For additional information, please visit the firm's website at <http://www.riccilaw.com>