Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. has informed the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that it will recall Load Range E tires used on 1996-2000 model 15-passenger vans. While emphasizing that the tires are safe, the company says replacing them with the most recent design “will provide an enhanced margin of durability.” (1/28/2002)

In April 2001 NHTSA issued an advisory that 15-passenger vans equipped with Load Range E tires were more prone to roll over following a tread separation than many other vehicles using the same tires, because of the vans’ size and handling characteristics. A fully loaded 15-passenger van traveling at a high speed would be particularly susceptible.

In a Jan. 28 letter to NHTSA, Goodyear said, “Load Range E tires are not defective. Nevertheless, Goodyear is committing to undertake a program to replace for free some of its earlier design LT245/75R16 Load Range E tires with its latest design, Load Range E tires (with 6 plies). This replacement program is limited to tires installed on 15-passenger vans (with or without a fifth row seat).”

The tiremaker will notify owners of the 1996-2000 large vans and buyers of the earlier design tires who own 1992-2000 model vans. Goodyear will also notify ambulance operators using the older tires, and replace the tires on pre-1992 vans upon request. The program will last for six months from the time notifications are received by customers.

TLPJ Claims Linkage

Trial Lawyers for Public Justice and Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety say the recall is linked to the recent ruling in Frankl v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., No. MER-L-003052-99 (N.J. Super. Ct., Mercer County, Dec. 18, 2001) in which a New Jersey superior court judge granted its motion to intervene and held that Goodyear’s efforts to keep its tire safety records secret would have to be justified.

The decision required Goodyear to provide TLPJ with a sealed affidavit, which Goodyear claims supports its confidentiality claim. TLPJ will respond to the affidavit by March 18, 2002, and continue pressing for public access to documents believed to contain important information about the dangers of the Load Range E tires. Such efforts could result in a broader recall, the organization said.

“We are thrilled that Goodyear has decided to replace some of these tires,” said TLPJ staff attorney Rebecca Epstein, who argued the motion to intervene and lift the protective order to unseal the documents in Frankl. “This limited recall, however, only underscores the need for Goodyear to stop trying to hide the facts about its Load Range E tires. Goodyear should let the public know the truth and not just selectively recall a small fraction of the millions of these tires on the road.”