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Retired tire builders testify against manufacturer.

By John Kelly Associated Press

August 23 2000

DECATUR -- Four retired tire makers testified today that Bridgestone / Firestone Inc. put quantity ahead of quality at the company's Decatur factory.

In sworn depositions to be used in lawsuits against the tire maker, the retirees said they were required to build tires from outdated rubber and craftsmanship suffered under the strain on mandatory 12-hour shifts.

"I want to look at the quality control and how it affected the overall production of tires." said Bruce Kaster, a Florida lawyer who represents several people suing Firestone. "I know I don't want a tire on my vehicle made by any manufacturer with workers who've been in their feet for 11 hours."

Bridgestone/Firestone again defended its Decatur plant, which the company said turned out most of the 6.5 million truck tires recalled this month for safety reasons. In a written statement, the company said the four witnesses are disgruntled former employees who left the plant during a bitter strike in the mid-1990's.

"It is important to note that these former employees are not representative of the many current and former employees who



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Name:
Kaster & Lynch,
P.A.

Status:
Jury awarded a
\$19 million dollar
Plaintiff's...

Fans:
11

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have, in recent media reports, publicly expressed high regard for the quality and management of the Decatur plant," the statement read.

Company spokesman Jim Prescott refused any further comment.

"That's the brush they want to paint these guys with," Kaster said. "I don't see them in that light. Some of them are very private people, and this is a little bit overwhelming for them."

All but one witness refused to comment, dodging dozens of reporters camped outside the law office where the depositions were taken.

Joe Roundtree, a former plant worker who retired in 1996, disputed the company's claim that he is testifying because he is disgruntled.

"I would like to think I could keep someone else from getting hurt," Roundtree said.

Roundtree said he told the lawyers that only 10 to 20 seconds were spent inspecting each tire, but sometimes tires were moving so fast that some couldn't be inspected at all.

He also said workers swabbed a solvent on outdated rubber so that it could still be used to make tires.

Roundtree also said that replacement workers hired during the strike did not get adequate training and did not have enough experience to make the same quality tires as were made prior to the strike.

"You can't take 1,400 people and put them on the street, then replace them with inexperienced people and expect to get the same product," he said.



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