

Lawsuit Filed in Van Accident

CBS Channel 5

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The lawsuit was filed in Hayward against Ford Motor Company and Enterprise Rent-a-Car Company for an accident that killed five people and injured nine others. The plaintiffs include family members of those who died and those who were hurt when a 15-passenger, 2002 Ford Econoline 350 van crashed on March 29th of 2003.

The van was rented from Enterprise in Hayward. It was taking youth group members from a Hayward church to an annual religious retreat in southeastern California, when it rolled over several times on Interstate 15 near Barstow, just 20 miles from their destination.

An attorney for the plaintiffs has called Ford's 15-passenger vans "coffins on wheels." In 2001 and 2002, Ford received three warnings about the high rollover rates for these vans from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Dalia Demian, sister of 21-year-old crash victim Mary Damian, said, "My parents and I will never see her big blue eyes again. We'll never get to laugh with her, or see her smile."

Lucy Saeed, who was injured in the crash, added, "I already lost my friends, and some of my abilities. I don't want people out there to lose any of their loved ones."

"It's just an accident waiting to happen," said plaintiff attorney Brian Panish. "You're going to take a large vehicle like this, load it with 15 people, that has this propensity to roll over, and it's just a matter of time before one of these rolled over."

Enterprise issued a statement saying that they do not feel it is appropriate to comment on the case now that it is working its way through the courts. Ford cited a CHP report that said that the rollover was most likely caused by driver fatigue, and that the injuries were so severe because most occupants were not wearing their seat belts.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs have stated that they want a jury trial. When asked about the possibility of a settlement, they said they would have to wait and see.