

Susman Godfrey Files Class Action Lawsuit Against World's Largest Maritime Vehicle Shippers

05.30.2013 | 10 | 21NEWS

Jacksonville, Florida — Susman Godfrey LLP, one of the nation's top antitrust litigation firms, today filed a nationwide class action against some of the world's largest maritime vehicle shipping companies, alleging price fixing of carrier services. The lawsuit comes on the heels of international raids against the carriers by competition authorities in Japan, the European Union, and the United States.

Car buyers who shipped vehicles manufactured overseas to the United States allege that the defendants conspired to fix shipping prices, resulting in inflated charges. Automobile manufacturers and automobile dealers passed on these inflated fees to automobile buyers and lessees.

The defendants, which include Wilh. Wilhelmsen ASA, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics AS, Nippon Yusen KK, Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha Ltd., and EUKOR Car Carriers, control about 70 percent of the global car shipping market.

“Over the past few years, cooperation among global antitrust enforcement agencies has dramatically increased, leading to coordinated investigations like we see in the vehicle carrier case and record fines,” said Warren Burns, Susman Godfrey partner and lead attorney on the case. “The conspiracy at the heart of the vehicle carrier case may be global in reach, but its effects have directly impacted American consumers. On the civil side, we’ve long focused on vindicating consumer rights through antitrust class actions where we have a chance to claw back overcharges and return them to our clients.”

On Sept. 6, 2012, Japan's Fair Trade Commission and the European Commission conducted coordinated dawn raids of multiple maritime shippers over suspicions that the companies colluded to fix prices and allocate customers. According to several media reports, the alleged cartel was formed to deal with rising fuel charges, personnel costs and shipbuilding expenses.

The investigations coincide with the U.S. Department of Justice's probe into the auto-parts industry, the DOJ's largest-lever price-fixing investigation in terms of the number of companies and executives involved. In this matter, Susman Godfrey filed a class action on behalf of plaintiffs alleging bid rigging and price fixing by the auto-parts makers in multidistrict litigation and serves as co-lead counsel for the end-payor (car purchaser) class.

Susman Godfrey, one of the preeminent firms in the country in antitrust litigation, filed the vehicle carrier case before the Honorable Henry Lee Adams, Jr., in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida. Warren Burns, a partner in Susman Godfrey's Dallas Office, along with Terry Oxford and Daniel Charest, are representing the class.