

U.S. judge taps lead lawyers for Takata air bag cases

By Jessica Dye

(Reuters) - Four plaintiffs' lawyers, including high-profile attorney David Boies, were appointed by a federal judge on Tuesday to lead civil litigation against Takata Corp and several car manufacturers for injuries caused by allegedly faulty air bags.

U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno, who is overseeing more than 85 lawsuits that have been consolidated in a U.S. federal court in Miami, picked Florida attorney Peter Prieto of Podhurst Orseck to lead the litigation.

Prieto filed one of the first U.S. lawsuits last year against the Japanese company alleging that Takata air bags are defective and can violently explode and spray metal debris at the vehicle's occupants.

Moreno selected two attorneys to oversee cases from customers who said they suffered economic losses as a result of the recall, such as lost resale value. They are Todd Smith, an Illinois trial attorney with the law firm Power Rogers and Smith, and Boies. Boies, who chairs the law firm Boies, Schiller & Flexner, gained fame representing the U.S. Department of Justice in its antitrust lawsuit against [Microsoft Corp](#), and later mounted a successful challenge to California's ban on same-sex marriage.

Florida attorney Curtis Miner will lead cases from plaintiffs who say the air bags caused personal injuries or deaths, the order said.

In addition to Takata, several automakers have been named as defendants in some of the cases, including Honda Motor Co, BMW, Ford Motor Co, Nissan Motor Co Ltd, Subaru Co Ltd and Toyota Motor Corp.

The lawsuits allege that Takata and the automakers knew for years about potential problems with the air bags, but failed to warn customers or alert regulators until recently. Takata's air bags have been found to explode too forcefully, and the problem has prompted automakers to recall nearly 25 million vehicles worldwide since 2008. The air bags have been linked to six deaths.

Prieto said he was honored by the selection. Smith said he was pleased with the appointment and looked forward to working with an "excellent group of lawyers." The other lead counsel did not immediately return requests for comment.

Tuesday's order also tentatively sets the first trial in the air bag litigation for March and April 2016.

(Reporting by Jessica Dye; Editing by Alexia Garamfalvi and David Gregorio)