

PRODUCTS LIABILITY – UNSAFE AIRBAG AND SEATBELT SYSTEM

Jaime Jackson recently settled a case involving an unsafe airbag and seatbelt system against Toyota on behalf of the firm's quadriplegic client. Our client was properly wearing her seatbelt driving on a rural York County road when another vehicle crossed the center line and struck her vehicle head on. She was rendered a quadriplegic in this accident. As a result of an extensive investigation which included downloading and analyzing the data contained in the vehicle's crash data recorder. It was determined that the airbag had deployed on a hair trigger at 2 milliseconds. After analyzing countless crash test, it was determined the typical point where the airbag should start to deploy is about 30-40 milliseconds. Extensive analysis and testing was done to show that the two millisecond deployment time was out of specification and defective. We were to prepared to show crash tests videos at trial to prove that the occupant in similar collisions needed and received a fully inflated airbag as late as 110 milliseconds. Unfortunately in our client's crash, because her airbag had started to deploy at two milliseconds, it had already started to deflate at the point she had moved forward and actually needed the airbag. Because the airbag had started to deflate there was nothing to restrain her head and neck resulting in her catastrophic spinal cord injury. The case involved a dozen experts from both sides in the fields of automotive engineering, airbags, seatbelts, biomechanics, accident reconstruction, spinal cord injuries and life care planning.

Airbags are supposed to be fully inflated before the passenger falls into it during a crash. Serious injuries occur when airbags do not timely deploy or fail to deploy at all. There are numerous low speed impacts where an airbag may deploy when it is unnecessary or severe impacts where the airbag does not deploy but an airbag is necessary to help protect the occupant; or as in this case the timing of the airbag deployment is not right.