If you were about to make a big investment—say, a new car, or tires for your current car—wouldn’t you want to know *before* you shell out money that the product isn’t dangerous? Johnny Bradley did. In 2004, Mr.
Bradley and his wife set out on a cross-country drive from California to Mississippi to visit relatives on their way to new Navy recruiter assignments in Florida. Before the trip, Mr. Bradley decided to equip his Ford Explorer with new tires. Having heard recent publicity about the dangers of Firestone tires, he made a different choice: Cooper Tires. But on a highway in New Mexico, the tread on one of the car’s tires separated, rolling the Explorer four times. Johnny Bradley ended up in a coma for two weeks. His wife wasn’t so fortunate—she was killed instantly. Mr. Bradley testified before Congress that he believes his wife would still be alive today if courts had not allowed Cooper to hide the evidence of the defect from the public.

That’s right—Johnny Bradley’s accident was hardly the first involving deadly tread separation on Cooper Tires. In fact, in several lawsuits against Cooper Tire, the families of victims have uncovered documents allegedly showing that the accidents were caused by tread separation. But Cooper, in virtually every case, has fought to keep that evidence under seal, claiming that to release it would expose the corporation’s “trade secrets.” In a related case, we fought to prevent Cooper from sealing the transcript of a public trial in which an Iowa jury found the company responsible for causing a rollover that left one passenger dead and rendered another a quadriplegic.

Remington Rifle Co., the nation’s largest producer of hunting guns, also fights hard to hide the evidence showing that a design flaw in its Model 700 causes the rifle to fire without anyone pulling the trigger. Had Montana father Rich Barber known about the risk, he would have chosen a different rifle for his family. Instead, he still mourns the death of his son Gus, who was only 9 when he was mortally wounded from a shot fired by a defective Remington rifle. Years later, we helped Rich unseal a court record showing that the same thing had happened to another child in Montana, only a few years earlier. But because the entire record was sealed, no one knew until it was too late for Gus Barber.

Today’s editorial in USA Today hits the court secrecy nail on its head: sealed settlements can and do kill. It’s about time Americans wake up and realize that our public court system is all-too-often being co-opted by private corporations to hide their dirty secrets and keep us in the dark about dangerous products. And it’s time we demand that something be done about it.

- See more at: http://publicjustice.net/blog/court-secrecy-can-be-deadly-and-needs-to-end#sthash.TLqv8x2.dpuf