

JUSTICE NEWS

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Auto Parts Industry Executive Pleads Guilty to Obstruction of Justice

Executive Agrees to Serve 14 Months in a U.S. Prison

An executive of an automotive parts company pleaded guilty today for his role in a conspiracy to obstruct a federal investigation and for attempting to obstruct justice, the Department of Justice announced.

Futoshi Higashida, formerly the president of a U.S. joint venture of an automotive body sealing products supplier based in Hiroshima, Japan, pleaded guilty today in the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Michigan to a two-count indictment charging him with conspiring to obstruct justice and attempting to obstruct justice. As a part of the plea agreement, Higashida agreed to serve 14 months in prison, pay a \$7,500 criminal fine and was sentenced accordingly today.

"The Antitrust Division takes just as seriously pursuing individuals in the automotive parts industry who attempt to hide the facts as it does the subversion of the competitive process," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Brent Snyder of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division. "We will continue to pursue the truth and to protect American consumers."

On Sept. 21, 2016, a federal grand jury in the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Michigan returned an indictment against Higashida and another executive, who remains under indictment. According to the indictment, the defendants, along with their co-conspirators, conspired from at least as early as June 2008 until at least September 2012, to delete emails and electronic records and to destroy documents referring to communications with competitors, in contemplation of a federal investigation. During the charged conspiracy, Higashida was employed by an automotive body sealing products supplier in Japan and later in Novi, Michigan, as president of that company's U.S. joint venture with another company. In addition, according to the indictment, on Sept. 25, 2012, intending to obstruct an official proceeding, Higashida instructed another individual to ensure that no phone numbers or call records remained on his cellular telephone and that no data remained on his computer that would reflect competitor communications.

Today's guilty plea is the result of an ongoing federal antitrust investigation into price fixing, bid rigging and other anticompetitive conduct in the automotive parts industry, which is being conducted by the Antitrust Division's criminal enforcement sections and the FBI. A total of 65 individuals and 47 companies have been charged in the Antitrust Division's investigations into the automotive parts industry. This case was brought by the Antitrust Division's Chicago Office and the FBI's Louisville Field Office, Covington Resident Agency, with the assistance of the FBI's International Corruption Unit and the U.S. Attorney's Offices for the Eastern District of Michigan and the Eastern District of Kentucky.

Anyone with information about anticompetitive conduct in the automotive parts industry should contact the Antitrust Division's Citizen Complaint Center at 888-647-3258, visit www.justice.gov/atr/contact/newcase.html or contact the FBI's Louisville Field Office at 502-263-6000.

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