

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA
INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION**

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IN RE: READY-MIXED CONCRETE PRICE)	Master Docket No.
FIXING LITIGATION)	1:05-cv-00979-SEB-VSS
)	
)	
THIS DOCUMENT RELATES TO:)	
ALL ACTIONS)	
)	

**PLAINTIFFS’ MEMORANDUM IN OPPOSITION TO IMI
DEFENDANTS’ MOTION FOR JUDGMENT ON THE PLEADINGS
REGARDING CLAIMS OUTSIDE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS**

I. Introduction

In bringing their Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings for Claims Outside the Statute of Limitations (the “Motion”), Defendants conspicuously fail to set forth the standard for pleading fraudulent concealment in the Seventh Circuit. Significantly, the Seventh Circuit specifically recognizes “self-concealing” fraudulent concealment as an exception to a plaintiff’s duty to plead defendants’ independent affirmative acts of concealment. *See Martin v. Consultants & Administrators, Inc.*, 966 F.2d 1078, 1094, 1096 n.19 (7th Cir. 1992) (finding on summary judgment that defendants’ fraudulent kick-back scheme was self-concealing). As the Seventh Circuit explained in *Martin*:

Cases generally distinguish between two types of acts that can constitute fraudulent concealment: acts that are self-concealing (such as frauds)[;] and acts where, absent a subsequent act of concealment, only the perpetrator, but not the fact that a cause of action might exist, would be unknown (such as a burglary). In the former case, concealment is established by the nature of the act; in the latter case, additional acts of concealment are required to trigger the tolling doctrine.

Id. at 1095, quoting *Hobson v. Wilson*, 737 F.2d 1, 34 (D.C. Cir. 1984), *cert. denied*, 470 U.S. 1084 (1985). Indeed, in the Seventh Circuit, plaintiffs pleading “self-concealing” fraudulent concealment need only show a “misleading, deceptive, or otherwise contrived action or scheme,

in the course of committing the wrong that is designed to mask the existence of a cause of action.” *Id.* at 1094, quoting *Hobson*, 737 F.2d at 34.

The Seventh Circuit has held that plaintiffs alleging fraudulent concealment must show due diligence in discovering their claim where the alleged unlawful conduct was “self-concealing.” *See Martin*, 966 F.2d. at 1096 n.19. However, “[i]n the other category of concealment—active concealment separate from the underlying wrong ... [t]he cases in [the Seventh Circuit] have generally held that diligence is not required” *Id.* at 1095 n.7 (“[t]he law of this circuit is that tolling applies to a statute of limitations where there is fraudulent concealment of either type [self-concealing or active fraudulent concealment], and diligence is required on the part of the plaintiff in the case of self-concealing frauds”). The Plaintiffs’ Amended Consolidated Class Action Complaint (“Complaint”) adequately alleges fraudulent concealment under both scenarios. Accordingly, the IMI Defendants’ Motion must be denied.

II. Argument

A. Standard for Judgment on the Pleadings

The IMI Defendants have moved the court for a judgment on the pleadings or, in the alternative, dismissal of Plaintiffs’ claims for purchases occurring outside the statute of limitations pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 12 (b)(6). *See* Defs.’ Mem. at 1 and 2 n.1. A motion for judgment on the pleadings is subject to the same standard applicable to a motion under Rule 12(b)(6). *Guise v. BMW Mortg., LLC*, 377 F.3d 795, 798 (7th Cir. 2004). As such, “[b]y moving for a judgment on the pleadings, the defendants have invited the court to consider the case under a legal standard that is one of the most generous to plaintiffs under the law.” *Firestone v. Standard Mgmt. Corp.*, 2005 WL 1606955, at *1 (S.D. Ind. July 5, 2005). The court must treat as true all well-pleaded facts set forth in the Complaint, construe the allegations liberally, and view all inferences reasonably drawn from the alleged facts in the light most

favorable to the Plaintiffs. *Forseth v. Village of Sussex*, 199 F.3d 363, 368 (7th Cir. 2000). Further, “[p]laintiffs may even posit facts in their brief. So long as those facts are not inconsistent with the complaint, the court must assume they are true for purposes of deciding the motion.” *Firestone*, 2005 WL 1606955, at *1.

B. Plaintiffs Adequately Allege a “Self-Concealing” Price-Fixing Conspiracy and Are Not Required to Plead Defendants’ Independent Affirmative Acts of Fraudulent Concealment With Particularity.

Plaintiffs allege in their Complaint that the IMI Defendants and their co-defendants and co-conspirators (collectively “Defendants”) engaged in price-fixing in the ready-mixed concrete industry in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. §1. *See* Complaint, ¶¶1-56. Plaintiffs allege that the Defendants’ antitrust conduct began on or before July 1, 2000, and continued through at least May 25, 2004. Complaint, ¶1. A month after this period, on June 29, 2005, the United States Department of Justice announced that the IMI Defendants had agreed to plead guilty and pay a \$29.2 million criminal fine, the largest fine ever levied in a domestic antitrust investigation, for conspiring and fixing the price of ready mixed concrete in violation of the Sherman Act. Complaint, ¶47. The Complaint expressly alleges that the Defendants’ fraudulent concealment of their unlawful conduct from Plaintiffs and other class members tolled the applicable four-year statute of limitations. Complaint, ¶¶50-54.

In *Martin, supra*, the Seventh Circuit recognized the “self-concealing” acts doctrine, which allows plaintiffs to prove fraudulent concealment without asserting any independent affirmative acts from a defendant where there exists some “misleading, deceptive, or otherwise contrived action or scheme, in the course of committing the wrong that is designed to mask the existence of a cause of action.” *Martin*, 966 F.2d at 1096 n.19. The Seventh Circuit’s recognition of “self-concealing” fraudulent concealment adopts the same formulation of the

doctrine as the Second Circuit.¹ See *New York v. Hendrickson Bros., Inc.*, 840 F.2d 1065, 1083-84 (2d Cir. 1988) (“fraudulent concealment may be proved by showing either that the defendant took affirmative steps to prevent plaintiffs’ discovery of injury or that the wrong itself is of such a nature as to be self-concealing”). Applying this rule, the *Hendrickson* court found that price-fixing conspiracies are inherently self-concealing. *Id.*

In their Complaint, Plaintiffs have pleaded conduct by the Defendants that was both: (i) inherently self-concealing, and (ii) specifically designed to mask a cause of action from Plaintiffs and other Class members. In particular, Plaintiffs allege that:

- Throughout the Class Period, defendants and their co-conspirators intended to and did affirmatively and fraudulently conceal their wrongful conduct and the existence of their unlawful combination and conspiracy from plaintiffs and other members of the Class, and intended that their communications with each other and their resulting actions be kept secret from plaintiffs and other class members. Complaint, ¶50.
- Defendants discussed and formed their anticompetitive agreements during secret meetings and conversations, often conducted at undisclosed, out-of-the way locations. No one other than the co-conspirators was invited or present at these meetings, and, by design, note taking was restricted. Defendants conducted these meetings in secrecy to prevent the discovery of their conspiracy by the members of the Class. Complaint, ¶51.

¹ The IMI Defendants mistakenly rely on disparate case law from the Fourth Circuit. See Defs.’ Mem. at 5. In *Supermarket of Marlinton, Inc. v. Meadow Gold Dairies, Inc.*, 71 F.3d 119 (4th Cir. 1995), the Fourth Circuit only recognizes the self-concealing conspiracy exception “when deception or concealment is a *necessary* element” of the alleged unlawful conduct. *Id.* at 122 (emphasis added). In contrast, the Seventh Circuit recognizes a self-concealing conspiracy exception where there exists “a misleading, deceptive, or otherwise contrived action or scheme, in the course of committing the wrong that is designed to mask the existence of a cause of action.” *Martin*, 966 F.2d at 1094.

Even so, *Marlinton* adopted an “intermediate” affirmative acts standard whereby a plaintiff could demonstrate fraudulent concealment by merely showing “affirmative acts of concealment by [the defendant]. Those acts, however, need not be separate and apart from the acts of concealment involved in the antitrust violation.” *Id.* at 126. As discussed below, Plaintiffs have not only alleged a self-concealing price-fixing conspiracy but have also alleged Defendants’ affirmative acts of concealment. As such, they have met the intermediate standard set forth in *Marlinton* as well.

Similarly, the IMI Defendants’ reliance on a single District of Minnesota decision, *In re Milk Prods. Antitrust Litig.*, 84 F.Supp.2d 1016 (D. Minn. 1997) is misplaced. Defs.’ Mem. at 5. In that case, the district court did not even consider the issue of self-concealing fraudulent concealment. *Milk Prods.*, 84 F.Supp.2d at 1023.

These allegations track language that has routinely been held sufficient to allege fraudulent concealment.

Because price-fixing conduct is “self-concealing” by nature, federal courts have consistently held that a plaintiff to a price-fixing cause of action is not required to plead the defendants’ independent affirmative acts of fraudulent concealment. *See, e.g., Hendrickson Bros.*, 840 F.2d at 1083-84 (because price-fixing conspiracies are inherently self-concealing plaintiff did not need to show defendants’ independent affirmative steps of fraudulent concealment); *In re Pressure Sensitive Labelstock*, No. 3:03-MDL-1556 (M.D. Pa. Jan. 19, 2006) (finding plaintiffs had adequately pleaded a price-fixing conspiracy and, therefore, had satisfied “the requirement of alleging with particularity Defendants’ concealment of the cause of action”), submitted herewith as Exhibit “A; *In re Issuer Plaintiff Initial Public Offering Antitrust Litig.*, 2004 WL 487222, at *4 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 12, 2004) (where plaintiffs had pleaded a price-fixing conspiracy which was inherently self-concealing, they did not need to show defendants took affirmative steps to fraudulently conceal their conduct); *In re Mercedes-Benz Antitrust Litig.*, 157 F.Supp.2d 355, 371-73 (D.N.J. 2001) (finding price-fixing conspiracy a “self-concealing conspiracy” satisfying fraudulent concealment pleading requirement); *In re Nine West Shoes Antitrust Litig.*, 80 F.Supp.2d 181, 192-193 (S.D.N.Y. 2000) (“by alleging a price-fixing scheme, [plaintiff has] no need to require the pleading of affirmative actions by the defendants to prevent the plaintiff’s discovery of its claim.”); *In re Infant Formula Antitrust Litig.*, 1992 WL 503465, at *2 (N.D. Fla. 1992) (denying motion for judgment on the pleadings regarding fraudulent concealment where, “[a]t the heart of plaintiffs’ claims regarding fraudulent concealment is an allegation that any price-fixing was kept secret.”); *cf. In re Sumitomo Copper Litig.*, 120 F.Supp.2d 328, 346 (S.D.N.Y. 2000) (finding in RICO action that, where plaintiffs

had alleged a self-concealing conspiracy, they did “not need to demonstrate that any of the Defendants took affirmative acts of concealment” to satisfy fraudulent concealment pleading requirement.)

The IMI Defendants do not contest that Plaintiffs have adequately alleged a price-fixing antitrust claim. *See generally* Defs.’ Mem. Moreover, Plaintiffs have specifically alleged that Defendants’ antitrust conduct was conducted secretly for the specific purpose of hiding a cause of action. *See* Complaint, ¶¶50-53. As the courts have recognized, “[r]egardless of whether concealment is an essential element of price-fixing, secrecy is its natural lair.” *In re Pressure Sensitive Labelstock*, quoting *In re Mercedes-Benz*, 157 F.Supp. at 372. In particular, the *Mercedes-Benz* court found that in the price-fixing context, defendants’ unlawful conduct is inherently self-concealing because “where a cartel does not control an entire market, they will agree to conceal their price-fixing conspiracy to reduce the risk that purchasers will substitute other products for the price-fixed product. In such a case, secrecy is sufficiently ‘intertwined’ with the aims of the conspiracy that it should be considered self-concealing.” *Id.* at 371 (quotation and citation omitted). Such allegations of secrecy and concealment are exactly alleged in Plaintiffs’ Complaint regarding Defendants’ price-fixing conspiracy. Complaint, ¶¶50-53.

C. Plaintiffs Have Pleaded Defendants’ Independent Affirmative Acts of Fraudulent Concealment With Particularity.

Regardless of the self-concealing nature of Defendants’ unlawful conduct, Plaintiffs have pleaded, with particularity, that Defendants engaged in independent affirmative acts designed to conceal their unlawful conduct from Plaintiffs and other class members. Complaint, ¶¶50-53. Affirmative acts of fraudulent concealment occur where a defendant “takes active steps to prevent the plaintiff from suing in time.” *Jackson v. Rockford Housing Auth.*, 213 F.3d 389, 394

(7th Cir. 2000) (quotation omitted). These active steps “include hiding evidence or promising not to plead the statute of limitations.” *Id.*

Plaintiffs have pleaded that Defendants took active steps to prevent Plaintiffs and other Class members from discovering their unlawful conduct. In particular, Plaintiffs allege that “throughout the Class Period, defendants and their co-conspirators intended to and did affirmatively and fraudulently conceal their wrongful conduct and the existence of the unlawful combination and conspiracy. . . .” Complaint, ¶50. Far from mere “silence or passive conduct,” Defs.’ Mem. at 4-5, Plaintiffs have alleged “affirmative and fraudulent” acts of concealment executed for the specific purpose of concealing the “unlawful combination and conspiracy from plaintiff and other members of the Class,” so as to prevent Plaintiffs and other Class members from being able to file a timely claim against them. Complaint, ¶50.

These active steps included Defendants’ hiding of evidence, or the analogous act of deliberately not creating evidence, for the purpose of keeping the details of their unlawful conduct from Plaintiffs and other Class members. As Plaintiffs allege in their Complaint, during Defendants’ secret meetings, “by design, note taking was restricted. Defendants conducted these meetings in secrecy to prevent the discovery of their conspiracy by members of the Class.” Complaint, ¶51.

Defendants have not offered a single case which suggests that in order to plead fraudulent concealment with adequate particularity, a plaintiff must plead the ““who, what, when, where and how”” of a defendants’ fraudulent concealment. *See* Defs.’ Mem. at 3, citing *Hemenway v. Peabody Coal Co.*, 159 F.3d 255, 261 (7th Cir. 1998) (discussing pleading a fraudulent omission claim), and *DiLeo v. Ernst & Young*, 901 F.2d 624, 627 (7th Cir. 1990) (discussing pleading securities fraud). Indeed, under Rule 9, a plaintiff need not plead facts that, due to the nature of

the alleged fraud, are within the defendant's control. *In re Craftmatic Secs. Litig.*, 890 F.2d 628, 645 (3d Cir. 1989) ("courts have relaxed the rule when factual information is peculiarly within the defendant's knowledge or control").

Nonetheless, Plaintiffs have met this pleading standard. In particular, Plaintiffs have pleaded that Defendants and their co-conspirators affirmatively and fraudulently concealed facts and evidence regarding their unlawful antitrust conduct, throughout the Class Period, by keeping their communications secret from Plaintiffs, by holding secret meetings at undisclosed and out-of-the way locations, and by restricting any note taking to prevent the discovery of their conspiracy by members of the Class. Complaint, ¶¶51-53. These allegations are more than sufficient to plead fraudulent concealment under Rule 9(b). *See, e.g., In re Catfish Antitrust Litig.*, 826 F.Supp. 1019, 1031-32 ("[p]roof of fraudulent concealment is found with any evidence of efforts designed to keep price fixing activities secret" – finding allegations of "clandestine meetings and telephone conversations" sufficient).

D. Plaintiffs Have Pleaded Due Diligence With Particularity.

Plaintiffs have adequately pleaded that they acted with due diligence but could not have discovered Defendants' alleged antitrust conduct, with information conclusive enough to file a claim, any earlier. Specifically, Plaintiffs allege that:

- Although one or more Class members and their counsel had been investigating possible pricing irregularities by defendants for approximately one year prior to the June 2005 announcement by the United States Department of Justice of the guilty plea entered by IMI, as a result of defendants' efforts to conceal their wrong doing such investigation did not result in the discovery of sufficiently conclusive information to file a claim prior to the Department of Justice's June 2005 announcement. Complaint, ¶52.
- Plaintiffs and members of the Class could not have discovered the combination and conspiracy alleged herein at any earlier date by the exercise of reasonable due diligence, because of the deceptive practices and techniques of secrecy

employed by defendants and their co-conspirators to avoid detection of and affirmatively conceal their actions. Complaint, ¶53.

Any due diligence pleading requirement is satisfied by these allegations.

Initially, under Seventh Circuit jurisprudence, plaintiffs who have pleaded a defendant's independent affirmative acts of fraudulent concealment are typically not even required to prove due diligence. *See Martin*, 966 F.2d at 1096 n.19. Further, "whether a party has exercised due diligence is a factual issue which cannot be decided on a motion to dismiss unless it appears beyond doubt that plaintiff can prove no facts to support the claim." *Bethlehem Steel Corp. v. Fischbach and Moore, Inc.*, 641 F.Supp. 271, 275 (E.D. Pa. 1986). *See also Klehr v. A.O. Smith Corp.*, 521 U.S. 179, 196 (1997) (noting that due diligence is a "fact-based question"); *In re Pressure Sensitive Labelstock*, at 9 ("[a]s a general rule, rejection of a fraudulent concealment claim on the pleadings for failure to allege due diligence is not appropriate"); *In re Catfish Antitrust*, 826 F.Supp. at 1031 ("[i]n any event, whether plaintiffs' duty was triggered before or immediately after January 1992 is a question of fact that need not and should not be decided on a motion to dismiss"). Indeed, the IMI Defendants' inquiry merely emphasizes the factual nature of the due diligence inquiry: "When and why did plaintiffs begin to investigate? If it was just 'one year prior to . . . June 2005' why then?" Defs.' Mem. at 6. *See Morton's Market, Inc. v. Gustafson Dairy, Inc.*, 198 F.3d 823, 833 (11th Cir. 1999) (defendant who invokes questions of why a plaintiff did not investigate at a different time "has succeeded in demonstrating only that there is a jury question regarding the tolling of the statute of limitations by fraudulent concealment").

Contrary to the IMI Defendants' assertion that Plaintiffs did not detail the time in which they discovered the Defendants' unlawful conduct or the nature of the discovery, Defs.' Mem. at 7, the Complaint plainly indicates that Plaintiffs discovered Defendants' conduct after the June

2005 Department of Justice announcement indicating that the IMI Defendants had agreed to plead guilty to “conspiring and fixing the price of ready-mixed concrete in violation of the Sherman Act.” *See* Complaint, ¶¶52, 47. Moreover, Plaintiffs timely filed a Complaint in this matter on June 30, 2005, within the same month of the DOJ’s announcement. *See In re Nine West Shoes*, 80 F.Supp.2d at 193 (“[o]nce plaintiffs were alerted to their potential claims by the media, they promptly filed suit and thus have satisfied the due diligence requirement”); *Am. Copper & Brass, Inc. v. Donald Boliden AB*, 2005 WL 1631304, at *7 (W.D. Tenn. July 6, 2005) (plaintiffs had shown due diligence where they alleged discovery of antitrust conspiracy through a “press release of September 3, 2004, which sets forth the concerted conspiratorial acts” and on “September 24, 2004 ... filed their original complaint”).

Finally, the IMI Defendants’ sole reliance on the opinion in *In re Milk Prods.*, 84 F.Supp.2d 1016 (D. Minn. 1997), for the proposition that raised prices of ready-mixed concrete should have put Plaintiffs on notice of their claims, is misguided. As the *Mercedes-Benz* court noted, “[t]he issue is not whether plaintiffs knew that the prices they paid were higher than they should have been, rather, the primary issue is whether the named plaintiffs and the members of each of the classes knew of the alleged conspiracy among defendants.” 157 F.Supp.2d at 373; *see also In re Vitamins Antitrust Litig.*, 2000 WL 1475705, at *5 (D.D.C. May 9, 2000) (“market trends as a matter of law do not constitute notice that particular defendants were engaged in acts of price fixing”), citing *King & King Enter. v. Champlin Petroleum Co.*, 657 F.2d 1147, 1156 (10th Cir. 1981), *cert. denied*, 454 U.S. 1164 (1982) (“[m]ere knowledge that [defendant] was raising and lowering prices does not provide knowledge that [defendant] was agreeing with other members of the ... industry to fix prices ...”).

Unlike in *Milk Prods.*, Plaintiffs here have pleaded the precise reason they were unable to discover Defendants' alleged antitrust conduct at an earlier date, specifically because of "the deceptive practices and techniques of secrecy employed by defendants and their co-conspirators to avoid detection of and affirmatively conceal their actions." Complaint, ¶53. *See also In re Nine West Shoes*, 80 F.Supp.2d at 193 (plaintiffs adequately pleaded due diligence where complaint alleged that "[p]laintiffs and other class members could not have discovered the conspiracy at an earlier date by the exercise of due diligence because of the affirmative, deceptive practices and techniques of secrecy employed by Defendants"). Accordingly, Plaintiffs have adequately pleaded due diligence.

III. Conclusion

In light of the foregoing, Plaintiffs respectfully urge the Court to deny the IMI Defendants' Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings.

Dated: January 26, 2006

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Scott D. Gilchrist

Irwin B. Levin
Richard E. Shevitz
Scott D. Gilchrist
Eric S. Pavlack
COHEN & MALAD, LLP
One Indiana Square, Suite 1400
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Telephone: (317) 636-6481
Facsimile: (317) 636-2593
ilevin@cohenandmalad.com
rshevitz@cohenandmalad.com
sgilchrist@cohenandmalad.com
epavlack@cohenandmalad.com

Stephen D. Susman
Barry C. Barnett
Jonathan Bridges
SUSMAN GODFREY LLP
901 Main St., Ste. 4100
Dallas, TX 75202
Telephone: (214) 754-1903
Facsimile: (214) 754-1933
ssusman@susmangodfrey.com
bbarnett@susmangodfrey.com
jbridges@susmangodfrey.com

CO-LEAD PLAINTIFFS' COUNSEL

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on January 26, 2006, a copy of *Plaintiffs' Memorandum in Opposition to IMI Defendants' Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings Regarding Claims Outside Statute of Limitations* was filed electronically. Notice of this filing will be sent to the following parties by operation of the Court's electronic filing system. Parties may access this filing through the Court's system.

Anthony P. Aaron
ICE MILLER
anthony.aaron@icemiller.com

Arend J. Abel
COHEN & MALAD
aabel@cohenandmalad.com

Bryan H. Babb
BOSE McKINNEY & EVANS, LLP
bbabb@boselaw.com

Steven M. Badger
McTURNAN & TURNER
sbadger@mtlitigation.com

Barry C. Barnett
SUSMAN GODFREY LLP
bbarnett@susmangodfrey.com

Steve W. Berman
HAGENS BERMAN SOBOL SHAPIRO LLP
steve@hbsslaw.com

Robert J. Bonsignore
BONSIGNORE & BREWER
rbonsignore@aol.com

Michael W. Boomgarden
United States Department of Justice
michael.boomgarden@usdoj.gov

Jonathan Bridges
SUSMAN GODFREY LLP
jbridges@susmangodfrey.com

W. Joseph Bruckner
LOCKRIDGE GRINDAL NAUEN PLLP
wjbruckner@locklaw.com

James A.L. Buddenbaum
PARR RICHEY OBREMSKEY & MORTON
jbuddenbaum@parrlaw.com

Jason R. Burke
HOPPER & BLACKWELL
jburke@hopperblackwell.com

Bryan L. Clobes
MILLER FAUCHER & CAFFERTY LLP
bclobes@millerfaucher.com

Jay S. Cohen
SPECTOR ROSEMAN & KODROFF P.C.
jcohen@srk-law.com

Stephen E. Connolly
SCHIFFRIN & BARROWAY LLP
sconnolly@sbclasslaw.com

Michael L. Coppes
EMSWILLER WILLIAMS NOLAND &
CLARKE PC
mcoppes@ewnc-law.com

Jeffrey J. Corrigan
SPECTOR ROSEMAN & KODROFF P.C.
jcorrigan@srk-law.com

Isaac L. Diel
LAW OFFICES OF ISAAC L. DIEL
dslawkc@aol.com

Jonathan A. Epstein
United States Department of Justice
jonathan.epstein@usdoj.gov

Yvonne M. Flaherty
LOCKRIDGE GRINDAL NAUEN PLLP
jmflaherty@locklaw.com

Jerry A. Garau
FINDLING GARAU GERMANO &
PENNINGTON
jgarau@fggplaw.com

Michael D. Gottsch
CHIMICLES & TIKELLIS LLP
michaelgottsch@chimicles.com

Mark K. Gray
GRAY & WHITE
mkgrayatty@aol.com

Geoffrey M. Grodner
MALLOR CLENDENING GRODNER &
BOHRER
gmgradne@mcgb.com

James H. Ham, III
BAKER & DANIELS
jhham@bakerd.com

Gregory P. Hansel
PRETI FLAHERTY BELIVEAU PACHIOS
& HALEY LLP
ghansel@preti.com

William E. Hoese
KOHNSWIFT & GRAF PC
whose@kohnsswift.com

Troy J. Hutchinson
HEINS MILLS & OLSON
thutchinson@heinsmills.com

Vincent J. Esades
HEINS MILLS & OLSON
vesades@heinsmills.com

Lisa J. Frisella
THE MOGIN LAW FIRM
lisa@moginlaw.com

Scott D. Gilchrist
COHEN & MALAD
sgilchrist@cohenandmalad.com

Thomas J. Grau
DREWRY SIMMONS VORNEHM, LLP
tgrau@drewrysimmons.com

Betsy K. Greene
GREENE & SCHULTZ
bkgreene@kiva.net

Theresa Lee Groh
MURDOCK GOLDENBERG SCHNEIDER &
GROH LPA
tgroh@mgsglaw.com

Marshall S. Hanley
FINDLING GARAU GERMANO &
PENNINGTON
mhanley@fggplaw.com

Michael D. Hausfeld
COHEN MILSTEIN HAUSFELD & TOLL
mhausfeld@cmht.com

George W. Hopper
HOPPER & BLACKWELL
ghopper@hopperblackwell.com

Michael B. Hyman
MUCH SHELIST
mbhyman@muchshelist.com

Daniel R. Karon
GOLDMAN SCARLATO & KARON PC
karon@gsk-law.com

Jay P. Kennedy
KROGER GARDIS & REGAS
jpk@kgrlaw.com

Joseph C. Kohn
KOHNSWIFT & GRAF PC
jkohn@kohnsswift.com

Shannon D. Landreth
McTURNAN & TURNER
slandreth@mtlitig.com

Joseph M. Leone
DREWRY SIMMONS VORNEHM, LLP
jleone@drewrysimmons.com

Jennifer Stephens Love
FINDLING GARAU GERMANO &
PENNINGTON
jlove@fggplaw.com

Chad M. McManamy
THE MOGIN LAW FIRM
chad@moginlaw.com

John M. Mead
LEEUEW OBERLIES & CAMPBELL PC
jmead@indylegal.net

Christopher A. Moeller
PRICE WAICUKAUSKI RILEY &
DEBROTA
cmoeller@price-law.com

John C. Murdock
MURDOCK GOLDENBERG SCHNEIDER &
GROH LPA
jmurdock@mgsglaw.com

G. Daniel Kelley, Jr.
ICE MILLER
daniel.kelley@icemiller.com

Jeffrey L. Kodroff
SPECTOR ROSEMAN & KODROFF P.C.
jkodroff@srk-law.com

Offer Korin
KATZ & KORIN
okorin@katzkorin.com

Gene R. Leeuw
LEEUEW OBERLIES & CAMPBELL PC
grleeuw@indylegal.net

Irwin B. Levin
COHEN & MALAD
ilevin@cohenandmalad.com

James R. Malone, Jr.
CHIMICLES & TIKELLIS LLP
jamesmalone@chimicles.com

J. Lee McNeely
McNEELY STEPHENSON THOPY &
HARROLD
jlmcneely@msth.com

Thomas E. Mixdorf
ICE MILLER
thomas.mixdorf@icemiller.com

Daniel J. Mogin
THE MOGIN LAW FIRM
dmogin@moginlaw.com

Cathleen L. Nevin
KATZ & KORIN
cnevin@katzkorin.com

Patrick B. Omilian
MALLOR CLENDENING GRODNER &
BOHRER LLP
pomilian@mcgb.com

Eric S. Pavlack
COHEN & MALAD
epavlack@cohenandmalad.com

Henry J. Price
PRICE WAICUKAUSKI RILEY &
DEBROTA
hprice@price-law.com

Mindee J. Reuben
WEINSTEIN KITCHENOFF & ASHER LLC
reuben@wka-law.com

William N. Riley
PRICE WAICUKAUSKI RILEY &
DEBROTA
wriley@price-law.com

Hollis L. Salzman
LABATON SUCHAROW & RUDOFF
LLP
hsalzman@labaton.com

Eric L. Schleef
United States Department of Justice
eric.schleef@usdoj.gov

Frederick W. Schultz
GREENE & SCHULTZ
fschultz@kiva.net

Charles R. Sheeks
SHEEKS & NIXON, LLP
crslaw@sbcglobal.net

Eugene A. Spector
SPECTOR ROSEMAN & KODROFF P.C.
espector@srk-law.com

Kathy L. Osborn
BAKER & DANIELS
klosborn@bakerd.com

Bernard Persky
LABATON SUCHAROW & RUDOFF
LLP
bpersky@labaton.com

John R. Price
JOHN R. PRICE & ASSOCIATES
john@johnpricelaw.com

Brady J. Rife
McNEELY STEPHENSON THOPY &
HARROLD
bjrife@msth.com

Kellie C. Safar
LABATON SUCHAROW & RUDOFF
LLP
ksafar@labaton.com

Robert S. Schachter
ZWERLING SCHACHTER & ZWERLING
LLP
rschachter@zsz.com

Robert J. Schuckit
SCHUCKIT & ASSOCIATES, P.C.
rschuckit@schuckitlaw.com

Anthony D. Shapiro
HAGENS BERMAN SOBOL SHAPIRO LLP
tony@hbsslaw.com

Richard E. Shevitz
COHEN & MALAD
rshevitz@cohenandmalad.com

Robert K. Stanley
BAKER & DANIELS
rkstanley@bakerd.com

Edward P. Steegmann
ICE MILLER
ed.steegmann@icemiller

Stephen D. Susman
SUSMAN GODFREY LLP
ssusman@susmangodfrey.com

Jamie Ranah Sweeney
PRICE WAICUKAUSKI RILEY &
DEBROTA
jsweeney@price-law.com

Justin M. Tarshis
ZWERLING SCHACHTER & ZWERLING
LLP
jtarshis@zsz.com

Frank J. Vondrak
United States Department of Justice
frank.vondrak@usdoj.gov

David B. Vornehm
DREWRY SIMMONS PITTS & VORNEHM
dvornehm@drewrysimmons.com

Ronald J. Waicukauski
PRICE WAICUKAUSKI RILEY &
DEBROTA
rwaicukauski@price-law.com

Lawrence Walner
LAWRENCE WALNER & ASSOCIATES
walner@walnerclassaction.com

Randall B. Weill
PRETI FLAHERTY BELIVEAU PACHIOS
& HALEY LLP
rweill@preti.com

Joseph R. Whatley, Jr.
WHATLEY DRAKE LLC
jwhatley@whatleydrake.com

Matthew L. White
GRAY & WHITE
mattwhiteatty@aol.com

Judy Woods
BOSE McKINNEY & EVANS, LLP
jwoods@boselaw.com

Robert J. Wozniak, Jr.
MUCH SHELIST
rwozniak@muchshelist.com

Kendall S. Zylstra
SCHIFFRIN & BARROWAY LLP
kzylstra@sbclasslaw.com

I hereby certify that on January 27, 2006 a copy of *Plaintiffs' Memorandum in Opposition to IMI Defendants' Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings Regarding Claims Outside Statute of Limitations* was mailed, by first-class U.S. Mail, postage prepaid and properly addressed to the following:

Steven A. Asher
WEINSTEIN KITCHENOFF & ASHER, LLC
1845 Walnut St., Ste. 1100
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Kathleen C. Chavez
CHAVEZ LAW FIRM
416 S. Second St.
Geneva, IL 60134

Robert Foote
FOOTE MEYERS MIELKE & FLOWERS,
LLC
416 S. Second St.
Geneva, IL 60134

Ellen Meriwether
MILLER FAUCHER & CAFFERTY LLP
One Logan Square
18th & Cherry Streets, Ste. 1700
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Krishna B. Narine
LAW OFFICE OF KRISHNA B. NARINE
7839 Montgomery Avenue
Elkins Park, PA 19027

Stewart M. Weltman
COHEN MILSTEIN HAUSFELD
& TOLL PLLC
39 S. LaSalle St., Ste. 1100
Chicago, IL 60603

Daniel E. Gustafson
Rena D. Steiner
GUSTAFSON GLUEK PLLC
650 Northstar East
608 Second Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55402

Samuel D. Heins
HEINS MILLS & OLSON PLC
3550 IDS Center
80 South Eighth St.
Minneapolis, MN 55402

Marvin Miller
Jennifer Sprengel
MILLER FAUCHER & CAFFERTY LLP
30 N. LaSalle St., Ste. 3200
Chicago, IL 60602

L. Kendall Satterfield
Richard M. Volin
FINKELSTEIN, THOMPSON &
LOUGHRAN
1050 30th St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

Richard A. Lockridge
LOCKRIDGE GRINDAL NAUEN P.L.L.PL
100 Washington Avenue South
Suite 2200
Minneapolis, MN 55401

/s/ Scott D. Gilchrist
Scott D. Gilchrist

Scott D. Gilchrist
COHEN & MALAD, LLP
One Indiana Square, Suite 1400
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Telephone: (317) 636-6481
Facsimile: (317) 636-2593
E-mail: sgilchrist@cohenandmalad.com