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January 6, 2009

NEWS SUMMARY: Green Bay Used Car Dealer Thao Bee Yang Sentenced to Six Months Imprisonment for Odometer Tampering

Steven M. Biskupic, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, announced that Thao Bee Yang (dob 8/18/72) , was sentenced in federal court yesterday to 6 months in prison for the crime of odometer tampering. United States District Judge William Griesbach also sentenced Yang to a term of one year of supervised release following his incarceration, and ordered him to pay restitution.

Mr. Biskupic stated: “Odometer fraud is a serious crime that strikes at the ability of the consumer to assess the true value of an automobile that is offered for sale. The costs to the victim include an inflated purchase price and higher insurance costs. Those who engage in odometer tampering not only cheat the public; they also do a disservice to honest and reputable used-car dealers.”

Thao Bee Yang, also known as “Bee” Yang, bought and sold used vehicles under the business names “Easy Auto Sales” and “Bee’s Auto Sales.” Both businesses were located in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Following a two-day trial in August of 2008, Yang was convicted of a single count of odometer-tampering, in violation of 49 U.S.C. § 32703(2). In sentencing Yang, Judge Griesbach found that, between early 2002 and mid-2004, Yang intentionally caused the odometer readings of a significant number of vehicles to decline substantially before selling those vehicles to customers.

Yang lowered the odometer readings by replacing instrument clusters. The instrument cluster is the set of instrumentation typically found under the dash of a vehicle that includes all the gauges, including the odometer. On more than fifty vehicles, according to the government, Yang replaced the original instrument clusters with units that had substantially lower mileage readings on the odometers. The odometer readings declined by an average of approximately 93,000 miles.

At trial, Yang claimed that instrument clusters were replaced for legitimate reasons (for example, to replace a broken gauge or light bulb). At sentencing, Judge Griesbach rejected this explanation, citing the pattern of downward changes in mileage as well as expert testimony that the failure rate for instrument clusters on the types of vehicles sold by Yang is actually very low.

In sentencing Yang to a term of imprisonment, Judge Griesbach noted the importance of following regulations pertaining to odometer changes and the need to deter others from engaging in odometer tampering.

Consumers who wish to avoid being victims of odometer tampering or odometer fraud may find additional information about these topics at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's website (<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/consumer/rights/odometer.htm>).

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Jonathan H. Koenig and Keith Alexander. The case was investigated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.