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Suppliers Sued Over 303 Tractor Fluids

By [Katie Kellenberger](#)

Two Missouri residents petitioned to file a class action lawsuit against [Smitty's Supply Inc.](#) and Tractor Supply Co., claiming yellow buckets of Smitty's Super S Supertrac 303 tractor hydraulic fluid purchased from both companies failed to meet advertised specifications and performance claims.

Both companies have denied the allegations; however, neither defendant responded to requests for comment. Before the case becomes a formal class action lawsuit, the U.S. District Court of the Western District of Missouri must certify the case for class action status. No timeframe has been announced at the moment.



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Two Missouri residents petitioned to file a class action lawsuit against Smitty's Supply Inc. and Tractor Supply Co., claiming yellow buckets of Smitty's Super S Supertrac 303 tractor hydraulic fluid purchased at both stores failed to meet advertised specifications and performance claims.

The petition claims Smitty's Supply and Tractor Supply Co. engaged in deceptive marketing and advertising practices. Additionally, it says the defendants are seeking roughly \$75,000 each to cover treble damages, punitive damages, interest, costs and attorneys' fees.

Some of the marketing and advertising claim highlights are assertions that the fluid provides extreme pressure and antiwear protection for tractor transmission axels and hydraulic pumps, and protects against rust and corrosion.

The petition also states the companies' choice to describe the product as multifunctional creates a false image that the defendants' 303 product was safe and effective for use in modern equipment.

Shawn Hornbeck, one of the plaintiffs, stated that the Super S Supertrac 303 caused damage in seven separate pieces of equipment, and Monte Burgess, the other plaintiff, noted he used the product in a multitude of equipment, including tractors, mowers and dump trucks. The plaintiffs did not respond to requests for comment.

"[The] plaintiffs' lawyers likely will look at other retailers and oil marketers' products, including in other jurisdictions, at a minimum generating substantial legal costs," [Independent Lubricant Manufacturers Association](#) CEO Holly Alfano said in a press release.

ILMA anticipates a regulatory initiative to come through the National Conference on Weights and Measures, but is operating its own quality testing program in the meantime. The group's ethics committee "believes oil marketers should properly indicate the limited use of tractor hydraulic fluids meeting the J20A and J14B specifications for use in 303 applications, including a cautionary statement that the tractor hydraulic fluid does not meet the specs for modern tractors [post] 1989," Alfano told Lube Report in an interview.

"The industry needs to come together to solve the quality issue outside of the courtroom," she urged.

In October 2017, Missouri's Department of Agriculture Weights, Measures and Consumer Protection Division ordered a stop sale on all 303 tractor hydraulic fluids, as the fluids were deemed harmful to current tractors. Georgia followed suit, issuing a stop sale on JD 303 oils in February 2018.

As a result of the stop sale orders, "economy" grades are now being labeled with J20-A and J14-B specifications in addition to JD-303. "Oil marketers contend that [JD] owner's manuals are still around and most buyers don't understand that J20-C or J20-D products are backward compatible. There is still the price point difference, but at a minimum there are specifications available to test claims," said Alfano.

John Deere developed JD 303 in 1930 and replaced it 44 years ago, and products making exclusive JD 303 claims cannot be tested for compliance. JD 303 was replaced with J14B, which was then replaced in 1978 with J20A. John Deere has declared all of

those specifications obsolete and has two current specs – JDM-J20C and J20D – along with its genuine Hy-Gard fluid. Some lubricant marketers have continued marketing hydraulic tractor fluids labeled as meeting the 303 standard, but critics say they do not meet the lubrication requirements of modern tractors and, in fact, can harm them.