



### **Aged Tires: A Hidden Danger on the Road?**

Contrary to popular belief, you can't judge a tire by its cover. Researchers and most experts agree that along with tread depth and proper tire maintenance, tire age is also crucial to your safety on the road.

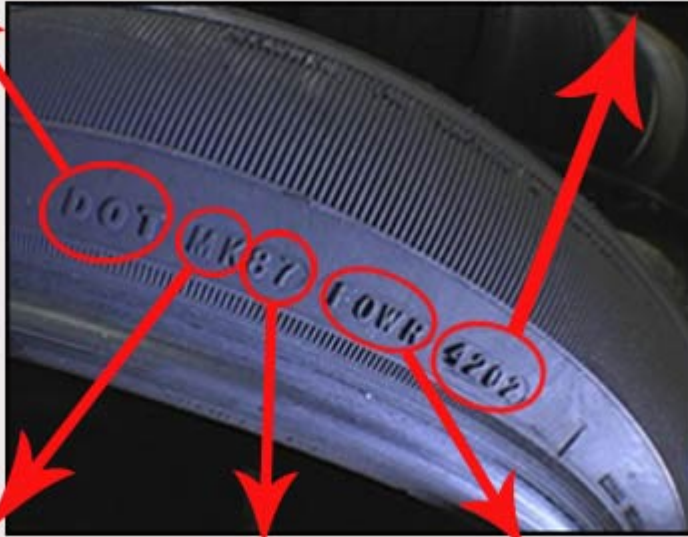
This tire was bought as new -- it has never been on the road -- but was nearly 14 years old when purchased. Despite its deep treads, this tire's inside layers have been slowly decomposing and drying out, what experts say make it like "a ticking time bomb."



Attorney Roger Braugh shows Brian Ross that aged tires have a higher potential for dramatic tread separation, which in many cases has led to tragic endings for unsuspecting motorists. Braugh says his lawsuits on behalf of dozens of victims have uncovered a pattern of corporate neglect and government inaction on the issue of aging tires.  
(ABC News)

**DOT: Tire meets DOT safety standards.**

**4202: Week & year tire was made -- 42nd week of the year 2002**



**MK: DOT's tire plant code**

**87: Tire size code**

**FOWR: Manufacturer symbol identifying tire brand**

This graphic breaks down the various codes in the Department of Transportation's serial number for tires. A cryptic code of four numbers at the end of the 12-digit DOT serial number can tell the consumer which week and year a tire was



This tire's DOT code indicates that it was made in the 41st week of 1994. Tires made in the 1990s have three numbers at the end of the DOT code, while tires made after 2000 have four numbers.



This tire is more than seven years old. It was made in the 13th week of 2001. According to experts like Sean Kane, who runs a private auto safety research firm, tires older than six years get increasingly more dangerous regardless of how long they've actually been on the road



ABC News' "20/20" sent producers undercover, rigged with hidden cameras, to tire retailers all over the county to see if any old tires are being sold as new. The undercover producers found half a dozen tires older than six years at this Sears in Jersey City, N.J. -- some were even older than a decade.



ABC News affiliates all over the country did their own investigations collaborating with "20/20" and the Brian Ross Investigative Unit for this report. In Indianapolis, WRTV-TV found old tires at three tire distributors. This tire was made in the 31st week of 2001.



In San Francisco, KGO's reporters found a nine-year-old tire, made in the 45th week of 1999, sold as new at a tire dealer.



And in the New York area, our undercover "20/20" shoppers found several Sears stores selling tires older than six years. Sears says it is unusual to have old tires in their inventory and told ABC News, "Consistent maintenance, proper inflation and regular inspection for tread wear patterns and damage are the keys to good tire performance. For consumers who are concerned about the age or condition of their tires, it is recommended they let us evaluate their tires regularly, which we'll do free of charge."



At another Sears store, we were told that a tire made 12 years ago, in the 46th week of 1996, was perfectly safe. Sears said, "We follow an inventory process of first in, first out, and we turn our tire inventory an average of more than three times a year. We note that there is a difference of opinion in the tire industry...about the service-life limits of tires. The safety of our customers is a top priority for Sears, and we'll continue to work with all interested parties to push for a consensus on tire service limits."  
(ABC News)