

CALIFORNIA - Los Angeles Times
Auto Products Wholesaler Fined \$650,000

Times Headlines

By John O'Dell, Times Staff Writer

A Southland auto accessories company has been fined \$650,000 for selling thousands of substandard taillight assemblies popular with younger motorists, federal regulators said Friday.

American Products Co. of Corona is a major wholesale supplier of customizing and performance products to retailers including Pep Boys, Auto Zone and JCWhitney.com.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said late Friday that American Products had sold various models of replacement taillights with clear lenses or lens covers that failed to comply with federal safety standards.

American Products President Brian Torres said the \$140-million-a-year company was targeted by regulators because it's the largest in a rapidly growing field. Some of the products were purchased from overseas suppliers, he said, and others "were manufactured under our interpretation" of regulations "that are 20 and 30 years old. Unfortunately, NHTSA challenged those interpretations."

In its statement, NHTSA said some of the company's taillight models were missing required side marker lamps or reflectors, and others replaced red lamps and reflectors with clear ones. In most cases, state and federal regulations require red automotive taillights.

American Products also sold "other noncompliant replacement lighting equipment" including clear corner and bumper lenses and kits to convert stock headlamps to brighter high-intensity discharge lamp systems, the agency said.

NHTSA said it has ordered recalls of thousands of American Products parts since 1999.

Information about the recalls can be found online at <http://www.nhtsa.gov> .
Motorists with questions can call NHTSA's toll-free hotline, (888) 327-4236.