



## CHRISTINE SPAGNOLI

GREENE BROILLET & WHEELER, LLP

PHONE: (310) 576-1200

EMAIL:

**PIONEER SPIRIT** Christine Spagnoli recites the grim toll: One Los Angeles police officer, paralyzed. Three U.S. Air Force officers, dead in Saudi Arabia. Two church members in Florida and two more in Sacramento — all killed because of design flaws in truck tires and large-capacity vans. Almost 20 years ago, Spagnoli spotted the patterns connecting these and other cases and has since devoted much of her practice to automotive product liability. She has won large verdicts and awards for her clients. More important, she has spurred changes that may have spared countless lives. Spagnoli's frequent adversary: The Ford Motor Co., maker of the E-350 15-passenger van, designed with a flaw that caused tire blowouts and rollover crashes that had particularly deadly consequences. Spagnoli won a \$25.9 million verdict against Ford and a Florida church in 2018 over a crash that killed two. It's one of three E-350 cases she has taken to trial. "I'm known as somebody who knows the history of the vehicle and has tried the cases against Ford. And juries have held them responsible." Still, "they keep crashing, and more people keep getting killed. Despite the fact that several juries have told them their conduct is reprehensible, they're not doing anything to take the vehicles off the road that are out there."

**TRAILS BLAZED** Spagnoli began focusing on automobile liability early in her career, working on cases arising from fatal crashes in the Ford Explorer. Soon she spotted a trend that crashes involving a certain type of tire on certain kinds of vehicles. She alerted the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which issued a consumer advisory about the E-350 and ordered Goodyear to recall the tire. But not all van owners received notice of the hazard. One was a Sacramento church, which "kept driving the same van with the same tires on it." After two church members died in a crash, Spagnoli convinced a jury to award \$50 million in punitive damages against Ford. Spagnoli's cases and others led Congress to mandate new safety standards for tires, and Ford and other companies have either stopped manufacturing the large vans or have made design changes to reduce the risk of rollovers.

**FUTURE EXPLORATIONS** As safety standards get tougher and designs improve, Spagnoli is happy to see fewer passenger-van cases these days. But as auto companies increasingly rely on new technologies in their vehicles, she expects a surge in litigation. Already, cases have been filed over the collision-avoidance technology installed in some cars, centering on why manufacturers put it in upscale models but not less expensive ones. Especially troubling to Spagnoli is the race to develop and distribute autonomous vehicles. "There still are no safety standards that allow any person to evaluate the performance of these vehicles. We're all going to be guinea pigs for the next 10, 15, 20 years until they iron out the glitches. And there will be glitches, no doubt about it."



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## Christine D. Spagnoli

### Named one of *The Recorder's* 2019 California Trailblazers

A leading plaintiff lawyer with an expertise in protecting rights for consumers injured or killed by dangerous products. She has focused much of her career holding the auto industry accountable for defective vehicles and tires. Her verdicts against major automakers have paved the way for other attorneys and saved countless lives.

### Recognized for *National Law Journal's* 2018 Top 100 verdicts

#### **\$25.9 Million Verdict**

*Estate of Salliotte v. Sam's East, Inc.; Ford Motor Company*

Christine Spagnoli was co-lead counsel in a deadly church van rollover trial which resulted in an award-winning verdict against Ford Motor Company and the First Baptist Church of New Port Richey for the wrongful death of a 44-year-old wife and mother of four.

### A Trailblazer for Female Attorneys

As the first woman recipient of the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles's Trial Lawyer of the Year award, Christine has shattered glass ceilings for other women trial lawyers. She was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by Consumer Watchdog for her tireless work to make the world a safer place. In 2018, the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles (CAALA) inducted Christine into its Hall of Fame.

**Greene Broillet & Wheeler, LLP**

100 Wilshire Blvd., 21st Floor, Santa Monica, CA 90401-1162 | Phone: 866-228-4133 | Fax: 310-576-1220