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CASE REPORT

FATAL PENETRATING NECK INJURY DUE TO DEFECTIVE AIRBAG INFLATOR

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Highlights

- Penetrating airbag injuries are rare but can have legal ramifications.
- In such cases, it is important to examine the fabric of the airbag that would indicate if the offending material was from the airbag structure.
- Forensic analysis is vital to determine if the offending material was due to a manufacturing defect.

Abstract

We present a case of a fatal motor vehicle collision of a 22-year-old car driver, who died at the scene after losing control of his car, and subsequently collided with a tree by the roadside. The subsequent autopsy revealed penetrating injuries on the neck, severing the larynx, carotid artery, jugular vein and fracturing the cervical vertebrae. Internal examination showed the offending material to be a semi-cylindrical metal fragment, which had lodged within the paravertebral muscle. Examination of the car with the authorities found that the metal fragment originated from a defective airbag booster cannister, which shattered upon deployment.

Keywords: Airbag; motor-vehicle fatality; penetrating neck injury; metal fragment; forensics.

Introduction

The installation of airbags in motor vehicles has been made compulsory by numerous governments as a public safety measure to ensure a safer driving experience. Since its introduction, fatalities resulting from frontal vehicle accidents have reduced significantly.[1] Airbags are designed to provide a cushioning effect to the head and chest during a frontal or

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