



# Department of Justice

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The Department of Justice filed a civil antitrust suit today charging Standard Oil Company of Ohio with fixing prices of gasoline and other products and services sold at stations operated by its commission managers.

Attorney General John N. Mitchell said the complaint was filed in the United States District Court in Cleveland, Ohio.

The complaint charged that Standard Oil Company (Ohio), known as Sohio, had engaged since September, 1968, in an unlawful combination and conspiracy through a series of agreements with its commission managers in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act.

The complaint charged that the agreements provide that the commission managers will sell gasoline and other service station products obtained from Sohio only at prices fixed by Sohio. In addition, the suit said, Sohio charged the same prices in its company-owned stations that it fixed for the commission manager stations. The agreements also restrict the commission managers to purchasing for resale only products approved by Sohio, the suit said.

Because of these activities, the suit said, retail prices of Sohio's petroleum products and of tires, batteries, automotive accessories, and services have been fixed at an arbitrary and non-competitive level, and consumers have been deprived of the opportunity to purchase such goods and services in a free and competitive market.

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The suit asked for an injunction restraining Sohio from fixing the prices of goods and services sold at service stations not operated by it, and from restricting the products or services such stations can offer for sale.

Richard W. McLaren, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Antitrust Division, explained that in operating commission stations, commission managers assume the risks of independent businessmen. These risks and the expenses of operation are not assumed by the managers of Sohio's company-owned stations, who are employees of Sohio.

There are about 14,102 service stations in Ohio. Approximately 2,946 obtain products from Sohio and sell them under the "Sohio" trade name.

Sohio owns or leases 2,116 of the stations, including 382 company-owned stations and, as of April, 1969, 104 commission stations operated under a commission manager agreement.

Sohio currently accounts for about 30 per cent of the motor fuel sold in Ohio, the suit said. The total 1969 revenues of Sohio and its subsidiaries were more than \$1.4 billion.