

French judge charges boss of breast implant firm

January 27 2012, by Anne Beade

A French judge on Friday charged the founder of the breast implant company at the heart of a global health scare with "involuntary injuries", his lawyer said.

More than 400,000 women around the world are believed to have received [implants](#) made by Poly Implant Prothese (PIP), which shut down in 2010 after it was revealed to have been using substandard, industrial-grade [silicone gel](#).

Its founder Jean-Claude Mas, 72, was arrested Thursday in the southern city of Marseille on the orders of an investigating judge.

His lawyer, Yves Haddad, said he was later charged with "involuntary injuries" during a late-night hearing and released on bail pending further investigation.

Mas was grilled by investigators and answered hundreds of questions, Haddad said, describing his client as "very cooperative", outlining the responsibilities of all company officials and his links with suppliers.

Prosecutors said police had also arrested Claude Couty, another former executive at the now-defunct PIP, in southern France.

Fears over PIP implants spread globally late last year after French [health authorities](#) advised 30,000 women to have theirs removed because of an increased risk of rupture.

Between 400,000 and 500,000 women in 65 countries are believed to have received implants from PIP, once the world's largest silicone implant producers.

A number of countries, including Germany and the Czech Republic, followed France in recommending that the implants be removed as a precaution but Britain has said it will not follow suit.

Thirteen countries in Europe and Latin America have also urged women to have a checkup.

French officials have said that cancer, including 16 cases of [breast cancer](#), had been detected in 20 French women with the implants, but have insisted there is no proven link.

Mas was arrested at his partner's home in the south of France. Dallest said police searched the residence, in the town of Six-Fours-les-Plages, for evidence.

During earlier questioning, Mas confirmed the implants were made with a non-authorised silicone gel but rejected any suggestion that they posed a health risk.

"I knew that the gel wasn't approved, but I did it knowingly, because the PIP gel was cheaper ... and of much better quality," Mas said, according to the minutes of a police interview conducted in October, and seen by AFP.

Philippe Courtois, a lawyer representing women who received the [PIP implants](#), said he was encouraged by Mas' arrest but did not expect his story to change.

"Considering the outrageous statements he has made in regards to all the

victims, we do not expect very much from this hearing," Courtois said.

Representatives of two groups campaigning for women who received the implants were to appear before the investigating judge on Friday.

Along with the manslaughter investigation, prosecutors in Marseille have already concluded an aggravated fraud case in the implant scandal that is expected to be brought to court by the end of the year.

Marseille prosecutors have received more than 2,500 complaints in the case, which has sparked calls for wider European regulation and monitoring of medical devices such as breast implants.

Mas, a former travelling salesman who got his start in the medical business by selling pharmaceuticals, founded PIP in 1991 to take advantage of the booming market for cosmetic implants.

He reportedly told investigators that he used fake business data to fool health inspectors.

The substandard gel was in 75 percent of PIP breast implants, saving the company about one million euros (\$1.3 million) annually, according to an ex-company executive.

In May 2000 the US Food and Drug Administration warned PIP of "serious" quality control violations involving saline implants after an inspection of its French factory.

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