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# Federal Trials Decline for Injury Lawsuits

Bloomberg News
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The number of personal injury cases decided by a trial in federal courts has declined by almost 80 percent since 1985 as more suits are settled, according to a U.S. Justice Department report released yesterday.

In 2003, the most recent year of the study, there were 768 trials, down from 3,604 in 1985. The annual number of personal injury cases in the federal court system varied over the 33 years of the study, averaging 44,770. There were 49,166 cases in 2003.

The report is the first to review
trends in federal court tort litigation over the course of three decades, said Thomas Cohen, a Justice Department statistician who wrote the study.

President George W. Bush has made curbing personal injury suits a priority. He has said that "frivolous lawsuits" hurt the economy and make it more difficult for the United States to compete with other nations. Trial lawyers say the suits compensate victims of defective or unsafe products and that taking a case to court is an important constitutional right.

This February, Bush signed a law that requires trial lawyers to file the biggest class-action suits in federal courts rather than in state jurisdictions that are considered more sympathetic to plaintiffs. Bills are pending in Congress to limit medical malpractice awards and create a $140 billion fund for asbestos exposure victims to end litigation that has bankrupted more than 70 companies.

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