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Avis parent may pay \$190,000 for unpaid tolls

Settlement still requires approval by county leaders

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Blowing off a \$1 toll behind the wheel of a rental car may seem like no big deal, but it has turned into an expensive headache for Avis.

P.V. Holding Corp., parent company for the rental car giant, has agreed to pay Harris County \$190,000 to cover \$12,116.47 in unpaid tolls and hundreds of thousands of dollars in administrative and attorney fees that accrued over the years.

Commissioners Court on Tuesday will consider the settlement, one of the largest ever involving toll road violators.

A spokesman for Avis did not return phone calls seeking comment.

The unpaid tolls were accumulated by thousands of drivers between 2003 and 2007, said James Harris, an attorney with Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson, the Toll Road Authority's collection firm.

"We all know of certain people who will get on this road and have no intention of paying," Harris said. "Avis has to deal with those people just as we have to deal with those people."

Before the two sides agreed on the proposed settlement, Avis was facing a \$374,000 bill, including nearly \$200,000 in lawyer fees.

Like several other large car rental companies, Avis has begun using an electronic system similar to an EZ Tag to pay the county for its customers' toll road use.

'A good deal'

Before that system was in place, the county had to ask rental car companies to hand over information about drivers who skipped out on tolls.

Avis did not comply, Harris said.

Over time, administrative fees, delinquency fees and court fees on the unpaid tolls ballooned to \$157,000.

"In order to save time, money and get the county its tolls, we agreed to the settlement," Harris said.

"It's a good deal for Harris County and a good deal for P.V. Holding."

The county still is working with other car rental companies, some of which owe even more, Harris said. He declined to elaborate.

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