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Jury awards widow of deceased oil worker \$15.2 million

NEW ORLEANS — An Orleans Parish jury today awarded the widow of a deceased oil services company worker \$15.2 million for the 1986 death of her husband.

The jury found that Harvey-based Intracoastal Tubular Services Inc. was responsible for exposing Lee Dell Craft Sr. to radioactive substances during his 30 years working at the company's Peters Road pipe yard and subsequently ordered the payment. It's believed that radiation led to the lung cancer that claimed Craft's life. The case was heard in Civil District Court Judge Ethel Sims Julien's courtroom.

"We are happy with the verdict," said plaintiff's attorney Mike Stag, partner with the Law Offices of Smith & Stag, who represented Craft's widow Frances Craft. "We think the jury came back with a reasonable verdict considering the circumstances."

The pipe yard cleans equipment used in oil and gas companies exploration fields. Stag said that over time the radioactive substances inside the equipment seeped into the air and ground at the yard putting hundreds of workers in danger.

Stag said this is the first oilfield radiation personal injury case to go to verdict, with others having been settled. The verdict could set a precedent for future similar cases, he said.

Stag said hundreds of workers were exposed at Intracoastal's West Bank plant and many of those individuals and their families have lawsuits pending in civil district court.

The extent of the radiation danger and the level of knowledge among oil companies only came to light in the late 1990s, Stag said. Since then, he said, plaintiffs have filed a number of lawsuits similar to the Craft case.

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