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Supreme Court turns down Exxon appeal of \$112M verdict

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By CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER / Associated Press

Exxon Mobil Corp. suffered a defeat at the Supreme Court Monday, as the justices refused to consider an appeal by the oil giant of a \$112 million damage award in an environmental lawsuit.

The court's decision Monday, without comment, effectively ends the litigation.

The case began in 1997 when a former Louisiana judge, Joseph Grefer, and his family sued Exxon, alleging that a contractor had contaminated the family's land with radioactive waste.

The contractor cleaned pipes for Exxon Mobil and other oil companies and left the waste, which occurs naturally as a result of oil and gas production, on the property. None of the Grefers were sickened by the waste.

The Grefers were initially awarded \$1 billion in punitive damages and \$56 million in compensatory damages by a Louisiana jury. The Louisiana appeals court ultimately reduced the punitive award to \$112 million.

Lawyers for the Grefers urged the court to reject Exxon's appeal, arguing that the

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company has already paid the damage award and rendered the case moot.

Exxon Mobil is an aggressive foe in the courts, fighting what it sees as excessive punitive damage awards. In February, the company's lawyers urged the justices to overturn a \$2.5 billion award imposed by an Alaska jury in 1994 as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. A decision in that case is expected by July.

The case rejected by the court Monday is Exxon Mobil v. Joseph Grefer, 07-1055.

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