

Wife Wants To Unseal Evidence In Cintas Dryer Death

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TULSA, Okla. (AP) — The widow of a Cintas Corp. worker who fell into an industrial dryer and died in 2007 wants a federal judge to unseal for public viewing more than 90 percent of the evidence in her lawsuit against the nation's largest uniform supplier.

Amalia Diaz Torres claims in a motion filed last week that the Cincinnati-based company is abusing the court's protective order by marking much of the case evidence as "confidential," forcing key documents and depositions to be blacked out.

Both sides agreed to the protective order when the case began, but Torres' attorneys now accuse Cintas of misusing it to "manipulate a favorable but misleading publicity campaign ... and drive up the costs and burdens of litigation unnecessarily," the 10-page motion claims.

"Cintas has further taken advantage of this situation by obtaining favorable media coverage ... and relying on its misuse of the court's protective order to keep the public from hearing the complete story."

Torres sued Cintas in 2007, claiming the company's plant managers knew about — and even encouraged — the dangerous working practices that led to the death of her husband, Eleazar Torres-Gomez.

Frank Frasier, an attorney for Torres, declined to comment directly on the case Monday, citing a court order discouraging both parties from talking about the case outside of court.

Company spokeswoman Heather Maley did not immediately comment Monday when contacted about the new motion.

Cintas, which supplies and launders uniforms for restaurant and hotel employees and other workers, employs more than 34,000 people. It posted sales of nearly \$4 billion in fiscal 2008.

On March 6, 2007, Torres-Gomez, a seven-year Cintas employee, climbed onto a slow-moving conveyor to clear a jam of wet laundry, instead of shutting off the machinery as he was supposed to do.

He jumped up and down on the clump and fell into the 300-degree dryer. Twenty minutes later, another employee heard his burned body banging around in the dryer and made the grisly discovery.

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Torres' suit claims her husband and his co-workers were encouraged by Cintas managers to climb onto the conveyors to dislodge clumps of uniforms to keep up with production.

The lawsuit cites closed-circuit videotape from the Tulsa plant before her husband's death showing "multiple incidents of Cintas personnel climbing on the shuttle conveyor" over a two-week period.

Last year, an Associated Press investigation found that in the year and a half after the accident in Tulsa, at least eight Cintas plants in six states had been cited by OSHA and state authorities for hazards similar to those that led to Torres-Gomez's death.

In December, the company agreed to pay almost \$3 million in penalties to resolve federal occupational safety violations in six cases, including the Tulsa death.

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