

Injured Workers Expand Lawsuits In Power Plant Explosion

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HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Attorneys for nine workers injured or killed in a Connecticut power plant explosion are suing companies involved with the plant, saying the facility was rife with violations.

The four lawyers filed a lawsuit for each of the workers Thursday in Middletown Superior Court, alleging plantowner Kleen Energy Systems, general contractor O&G Industries, of Torrington, and Bluewater Energy Solutions of Acworth, Ga., failed to take precautions to prevent the Feb. 7 blast. The explosion killed six workers and injured 50 others.

"This is a complaint that addresses the responsibility of general contractors, safety engineers and the owner of a power plant to protect all of the workers," said attorney Robert Reardon, who represents three injured workers in the case. "This was a rampant case of a lack of safety with 119 violations according to (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration)."

The under-construction plant in Middletown exploded when something ignited natural gas and air that had accumulated while high-pressure gas was forced through pipes to clean them.

The ignition source is still under investigation.

The attorneys said the lawsuits came after three visits to the plant and separate examinations of some equipment.

The lawsuits, filed on behalf of three of the plant's workers who were killed and another six who were hurt, hit the three companies with charges, including not implementing an alarm system to alert workers of unsafe gas levels and failing to properly train workers to recognize the dangers of venting natural gas.

The lawyers also said the companies should have used an alternative to natural gas, which they said is highly flammable, and should have vented the gas high above the facility.

Kleen Energy said Thursday in a statement that it had not seen the lawsuits and would not comment. A spokesman for O&G Industries also declined comment.

A message left for Bluewater Energy Solutions was not returned Thursday.

Another injured worker, Nicholas Novik, of River Vale, N.J., filed a federal lawsuit against the three companies and Keystone Construction & Maintenance Services, of

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Rowley, Mass., on Aug. 16 for \$6 million over injuries suffered in the blast.

OSHA imposed \$16.6 million in fines on Aug. 5 against the companies involved in the blast, saying the companies disregarded industry procedures and their own safety guidelines.

A panel created by Gov. M. Jodi Rell is also in the midst of reviewing the power plant explosion and working on new rules for constructing future power plants in Connecticut.

The attorneys said the families they represent are still reeling from the aftermath of the explosion. The survivors are suffering from physical injuries, cases of anxiety, depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, they said.

"The message I hear from the families is that they hope that this litigation will prevent anything like this from happening again," said Jim Bartolini.

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