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BP TO PAY MILLIONS TO FAMILIES IN BLAST

■ Settlements of claims come as allegations of mismanagement dog the oil giant

By ANNE BELLI
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

BP has agreed to pay several of the families of those killed in the deadly Texas City refinery explosion tens of millions of dollars each to settle wrongful death claims, sources familiar with the cases said.

Attorneys representing those families would not confirm or even discuss the settlement amounts, citing confidentiality agreements with the oil behemoth. Neither would BP officials.

But the attorneys acknowledged that after just a few weeks of talks, many of the cases in recent days have settled with BP agreeing to generous payments.

Fifteen people were killed in the March 23 blast and more than 170 injured, dozens of them seriously, in what was the worst United States refinery accident in recent memory.

4 other cases settled

Richard Mithoff, who represents the families of five others killed in the trailer as well as relatives of another refinery worker killed in a 2004 explosion, said settlements have been reached in four of those cases. The remaining two likely will be signed in the next week.

Mithoff declined to name the families in four of the five recent cases, saying they had not even filed lawsuits in court. One widow, Renae Bolton, did file a case this week in Galveston County, said Mithoff, who is representing her with Dallas attorney Michael Peticolas.

"I think there is a clear recognition on the part of BP that they would be held accountable in a court of law," Mithoff said. "I think they are attempting to come forward in good faith."

He added that BP has worked uncommonly fast to settle the cases. "I've been involved in a lot of early negotiations but none have settled this early," Mithoff said.