

Families of blast victims sue plant for negligence Suit: Dangerous conditions caused deaths

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Families of three victims of a north-west Houston plant explosion sued the company for negligence Friday, contending that dangerous conditions caused their deaths and those of five other employees.

Attorney Richard Mithoff filed the state district court suit against Wyman-Gordon Co. and Wyman-Gordon Forgings Inc., operators of the metal forging plant where tanks exploded Dec. 22. Another defendant is Cooper Cameron Corp, which had performed work on the tanks.

The suit alleges 50 acts of negligence by Wyman-Gordon, including failure to install or maintain proper safety equipment to avoid the explosion, failure to provide safety training for workers, and failure to have adequate emergency pro-

cedures and rescue personnel available. "Men were sent to do work for which they were not trained or equipped," Mithoff said.

Plant spokesman George Nelson said the suit would be reviewed before any comment, but that company officials believe the plant was safe then and "even safer now."

Wyman-Gordon attorneys were disappointed that the families had rejected very "reasonable and generous" settlements, Nelson said.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration concluded that the deaths "could and should have been prevented," and fined Wyman-Gordon \$1.8 million for safety violations.

Plaintiffs are the families of Steven Nagy, 29, Amos Lightfoot, 56, and Donald Terry Sr., 60.

They were among the workers preparing to change seals on a 90-foot-tall tank

containing highly pressurized nitrogen gas.

Employees, believing the tank to be empty, were removing its top covering cap when it exploded.

It took authorities about three months to positively identify some of the workers.

Seals had not been changed on the tank in 20 years, OSHA investigators said.

They faulted the company for a lack of safety devices that would have required the tank be closed and locked to ensure that it could be opened without fear of explosion.

Plaintiffs include the estates of the three workers and 15 family members.

They are seeking unspecified damages for the loss of companionship and for past and future mental anguish.

Nelson said negotiations are continuing with relatives of the five other victims.