

## Lawsuit is settled in sugar mill blast

By **ERIC HANSON**  
Houston Chronicle

**RICHMOND** — A worker who was seriously burned in a sugar plant explosion five years ago and the company responsible for installing an anti-explosion system at the facility have reached a \$5.5 million settlement.

Otis Maynard Jr., who was injured in the Aug. 28, 1998, incident, settled the lawsuit with Kidde-Fenwal Inc., Houston attorney Richard Mithoff, who represented Maynard, said Monday. The case was settled two days before it was to go to court.

"We felt it was in the best interest of our client," said Mark Allen, Kidde-Fenwal's attorney.

Maynard, who was 42 when he was injured, was working at the Imperial Sugar Co. refinery in Sugar Land when an explosion occurred in one of the mills.

According to court documents, Maynard was operating a sugar

mill, a process that creates explosive sugar dust. To prevent an explosion, a suppression system was installed in the mill, and Mithoff said that system failed when the dust ignited.

"Had it worked properly, the explosion would have been contained in the sugar mill," Mithoff said.

Mithoff said sensors are supposed to detect an explosion and then inject a suppressant into the mill to prevent a blast.

Instead, flames shot out from the machine and Maynard sustained second- and third-degree burns to about 40 percent of his body, Mithoff said.

Mithoff said Maynard's burns were mostly to the area of his abdomen and arms.

"He is no longer able to work," Mithoff said.

No one else was injured.

The case was to go to trial Wednesday morning in the court of state District Judge Thomas Culver.