

East Texan knew about the implant perils years ago

By **DEBORAH TEDFORD**
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A Liberty County woman says she knew 15 years ago what the American public learned Monday — that the manufacturer of a silicone gel breast implant had extensive knowledge of problems with the product.

Norma Corley of Cleveland was the first woman to successfully pursue a lawsuit against Dow Corning — with a Harris County jury awarding her \$170,000 in 1977. She said Monday she sued the company after a 1972 breast implant she received following a double mastectomy leaked.

"It (the incision) kept getting an infection," said Corley. "They waited a while, and they put another one in. They tried skin grafts, and it still wouldn't heal."

The leakage made it impossible for surgeons to replace the implant, Corley said.

With the current disclosures, she said, she is really worried about the effects the silicone remaining in her body may have on her health. "I feel like a time bomb, because I know some of that stuff went into that system," she said.

Corley said she has never received any information from the company and still has many questions. "I don't even know what kind of doctor to go to" to ask about potential complications, she said.

Corley's attorney, Richard Mithoff of Houston, said, "Dow made no attempt following this judgment to warn other women of this problem, to my knowledge. I find it hard for Dow to claim they were not aware of the propensity of these devices to leak."

A 4½-pound book of the company's internal documents, released Monday at the demand of the U.S.

Food and Drug Administration, revealed the company had decades of complaints that its silicone gel breast implants had caused medical problems similar to Corley's.

At least one document released Monday predated Corley's surgery. A March 1971 memo told of a New Orleans patient whose breast became irritated about four months after receiving an implant following a mastectomy.

Twice, the woman's doctor thought it was an infection and gave her penicillin. The irritation went away and then came back. After the third occurrence, the doctor found "the irritation had lacerated, and the fluid was oozing from the wound," the company memo said.

It said the doctor then removed the implant and found it "was partially empty of gel and what gel was there was extremely fluid and oozed out of the prosthesis and the surrounding tissue."

When Corley sued, Dow Corning offered a \$5,000 settlement prior to trial but later withdrew the offer, said Mithoff.

By the time the Texas Supreme Court refused to hear the case, he said, the entire process took more than 1½ years.

"Dow had never lost one until this case," Mithoff said. "They put a guy on the stand, and he would pounce on them (the implants) and push on them to prove how durable they were."

Mithoff recalled that the seven women jurors were not amused. The \$170,000 award, he said, was a lot of money in 1977 — Dow called it excessive.

Since then, Mithoff said, he has gotten queries from attorneys all over the country.