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Jury favors 6 Texans in suit over I-10 crash

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LAFAYETTE, LA. — A jury has ruled that Allied Van Lines should pay nearly \$32 million to a group of Texans whose SUV was thrown into the air and caught fire, killing two people and seriously burning two others, when a moving van slammed into traffic stopped by a minor accident.

About 70 percent of the money was awarded to Lisa Guerra and her friend Joe Alfaro, both 20 at the time of the 2003 wreck, for medical expenses, lost earning capacity, disfigurement, and pain and suffering.

Guerra, burned over two-thirds of her body, was awarded

\$9.1 million and Alfaro, burned over 85 percent of his body, \$13.3 million.

"This will go a long way toward helping with ongoing medical expenses," Houston attorney Richard Mithoff said last week, after the three-week trial ended before U.S. Magistrate C. Michael Hill.

Guerra's sister, Cindy Guerra, 18, and their cousin Jennifer Garza, 9, were among five people killed in the accident on the raised portion of Interstate 10 over the Atchafalaya Basin.

The others were the moving van's driver, Wladyslaw Gorski, 47, of Palm Harbor, Fla.; Karla Dunn, 28, of Denham Springs;

and Melissa Dunn, 22, of West Monroe.

Guadalupe and Amelia Guerra, of Harlingen, were driving their family to Disney World when they got caught in the traffic jam.

They were awarded \$6.25 million and Garza's parents, Rene and Patricia Garza, \$3.25 million.

The verdict was unusually large for a damages suit that was not a class action, Mithoff said. Neither Allied's attorney nor an attorney for one of its insurers could be reached for comment.

Mithoff said the jury deliberated about 6½ hours before returning the verdict Tuesday.