

Victims settle for \$10 million in bus crash

■ No criminal charges filed in Jan. 2 accident that killed 1 passenger and injured 46

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Victims in a bus crash near Victoria have agreed to a \$10 million settlement with the insurance companies for the Houston owners, operators and driver of the motor carrier, lawyers said.

Houston crane operator Pedro Mendez, 55, was killed in the crash on U.S. 59 near Victoria that occurred when a sleepy driver oversteered, causing the 2005 Volvo bus owned by Capricorn Bus Lines Inc. of Houston to overturn.

Forty-six passengers, including two who had arms amputated, were injured in the Jan. 2 accident.

Mendez's widow, Rosalba, was also hurt in the accident, as was their daughter Veronica, who accompanied her parents from Monterrey, according to the Mendez family attorneys,

Richard Mithoff and Janie Jordan.

The Mendez family received \$4.3 million in the settlement, and the rest was divided among 44 of the 46 injured passengers who sued Capricorn and two other bus operators: International Charter Services, Inc. and Transportes Chavez, Inc.

No criminal charges were filed in connection with the crash.

Lease deal

Capricorn leases its buses to International Charter Service, which can legally transport passengers across state lines and into Mexico.

The company was created for the owner of Capricorn with the assistance of Transportes Chavez, according to sworn depositions in the case.

All 47 passengers were traveling back to Houston from Monterrey after the Christmas and New Year holidays when the bus rolled over and a truck crashed into the toppled vehicle.

"This settlement represents all of the insurance proceeds available to date to settle the claims arising out of this tragic accident," said Mithoff, one of the Mendez family lawyers.

"These companies had a limited amount of insurance and all has been tendered in this settlement. Our investigation continues as to the involvement of any other responsible parties."

Safety records

State District Judge Elizabeth Ray signed the order last week dispersing the funds for the settlement and the final settlement documents were distributed to lawyers this week.

"I'm happy because in spite of the horrible nature of the accident and all the fractures I suffered, we got very good medical attention in Victoria and here," said Zulema Villarreal, 53, a Houston resident who was returning from a family funeral in Monterrey when the Capricorn bus overturned.

Villarreal advised Houston residents to investigate the safety records of bus lines before taking a trip.

"One should check, if the bus company has had accidents, and if their equipment is in good condition, and the most important, that you need to be sure there are two drivers for a long trip like that."

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