



\$2M accepted in carbon monoxide case that left Riga man permanently disabled

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ADRIAN, Mich. — A settlement of more than \$2 million was accepted Monday in Lenawee County Circuit Court to resolve a lawsuit over carbon monoxide poisoning that left a Riga man permanently disabled.

Larry Brenke, 60, is to receive payments from four companies involved in the 2009 poisoning in a recreational vehicle during a trip to Wisconsin. The RV owner, Allen Smith and Al Smith Concrete Construction of Blissfield, agreed to pay \$1 million. The company that built the custom RV, Cobra Truck & Fabrication of Ottawa Lake, is to pay another \$1 million.

Companies that inspected the vehicle and supplied a carbon monoxide alarm agreed to settlements totaling another \$75,000.

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“I think it’s a good result for Mr. and Mrs. Brenke, given the facts and circumstances of the case,” said the Brenkes’ attorney, Courtney Morgan of Dearborn. No amount of money, however, could make up for the injury to Larry Brenke’s health, he said.

The lawsuit was filed in December 2009 and faced challenges from a number of defendants.

A settlement with remaining defendants came together quickly after the suit went through case evaluation in April where the \$2 million in awards were recommended.

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Cobra Truck & Fabrication and Allen Smith were most at fault in creating the carbon monoxide hazard, Morgan said. Cobra Truck & Fabrication built the RV on a trailer chassis and installed a gasoline-powered electric generator under the living quarters without proper exhaust ventilation, he said. Smith had drilled holes in the floor of the RV to install equipment, he said, providing a path for exhaust gases to enter the RV.

The carbon monoxide poisoning happened in June 2009 when Brenke and another man accompanied Smith on a trip to a tractor-pulling event in Tomah, Wis. The morning after their first night there, friends found Smith and Brenke unconscious in the RV. The third man was ill and disoriented.

Brenke failed to fully recover. He was ruled a protected person in Lenawee County Probate Court where his wife, Jane Brenke, was appointed his guardian. Adrian attorney Burke Castleberry was appointed Monday by Judge Margaret M.S. Noe as guardian ad litem to monitor settlement funds.

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In addition to the two \$1 million awards, a \$50,000 settlement was made by Walter Kidde Portable Equipment of North Carolina, which marketed a Chinese-made carbon monoxide alarm that allegedly failed to sound in the Smith RV. A \$25,000 settlement was made by T.R. Arnold & Associates, an Indiana company that inspected the Smith RV after it was built.

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