

Companies Pay \$15M To Settle Explosion Case

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

A handful of companies agreed to pay more than \$15 million to settle a lawsuit stemming from a deadly 1999 explosion and fire at a nursing home that left five people dead.

Federal, state and city investigators were unable to determine the cause of the Nov. 10, 1999 explosion at Clara Barton Terrace Convalescent Center. But experts hired by the plaintiffs decided that boiler supports in the nursing home's basement collapsed, rupturing a gas main and leading to the blast.

"We ruled out every other [possible] cause," Jeffrey T. Meyers, one of the lawyers who represented nursing homes residents, employees and their families, told The Flint Journal.

The plaintiffs in the case, which was heading toward trial, included some relatives of those killed. They spent about \$250,000 on experts to determine the cause.

Goyette Mechanical Company Inc., Continuum of Flint and Beecher Manor Inc. agreed to pay a total of nearly \$1 million each, attorneys said, and Ventas, which owned the building and grounds, will pay about \$5 million.

Goyette had worked on the boilers before the explosion, Continuum was the nursing home operator and Beecher Manor was tied to Clara Barton. The newspaper said rest of the settlement apparently will be paid by Hartford Steam Boiler and Inspection Co., which had inspected the boilers several times over the previous six years.

All of the defendants had denied any liability in the blast, and none admitted to any negligence in agreeing to the settlements.

Attorneys for Hartford had argued in court papers that an accumulation of natural gas caused the explosion and that the gas supply line was not part of its inspection.

Flint Fire Chief Bob Elizondo said he agrees with lawyers who handled the case that the fire department should have the resources and expertise to investigate such catastrophes.

"I would hope that if something like that happened on my watch, we would do everything possible to be part of a thorough investigation," Elizondo said. "Somebody has to be accountable for things like this, and we don't have the manpower presently."

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