Rig Victims' Relatives Weigh in on BP Plea Deal

MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Shelley Anderson, whose husband was one of 11 workers killed in the Deepwater Horizon rig explosion, made a New Year's resolution to try to avoid crying in front of their children.

"Like most New Year's resolutions, I didn't do too well. Jason not being with us is hard enough for them to understand. My sorrow only makes that worse," Anderson wrote in a letter to the federal judge presiding over a plea deal that calls for BP PLC to pay a record $4 billion in criminal penalties for the 2010 disaster.

Other victims' relatives are sharing their stories with U.S. District Judge Sarah Vance as she prepares to decide whether to accept the London-based oil giant's plea agreement with the Justice Department. Wednesday was the deadline for victims to submit written statements about the deal to Vance, who is expected to rule on BP's criminal settlement at a Jan. 29 hearing.

Siblings of another victim, Gordon Jones, said BP's sentence should include a personal apology to family members. Chris Jones said he would be satisfied if BP executives and board members visited Baton Rouge and told his brother's widow and children that they are sorry.

"As an attorney, I respect the law and the rights extended to BP," Chris Jones wrote. "But what I do not and never will respect is BP's refusal to acknowledge its responsibility for this accident."

Chris Jones also urged Vance to consider stiffer penalties that prohibit or limit the company's ability to operate in U.S. waters.

"It will move on from this and continue to make billions of dollars in profit in United States waters for its stockholders," he wrote. "Whereas BP will live on, Gordon will not."

Jason Anderson's father, Billy Fred Anderson, urged Vance to reject the deal and called for BP to pay billions more in restitution, including additional payments to families.

"The plain and simple fact here is BP killed my son in their efforts to speed up operations, to save time and money not only at the expense of my son's life, but also the lives of ten of his crew members," he wrote.

Buddy Trahan, a worker who was severely injured in the blast, also urged her to reject the deal.

"It is incomprehensible that BP will be permitted to settle its criminal liability when,

after nearly 3 years of opportunity, it has failed and refused to satisfactorily address the claims of victims injured or killed as a result of its conduct," he wrote.

BP agreed in November to plead guilty to criminal charges involving the deaths of 11 workers and to lying to Congress about how much oil spilled from its blown-out well. BP can withdraw its agreement if Vance rejects the deal. If she accepts it, Vance must impose a sentence that adheres to the agreed-upon terms.

The settlement calls for BP to pay nearly $1.3 billion in fines. The largest previous corporate criminal penalty assessed by the Justice Department was a $1.2 billion fine against drug maker Pfizer in 2009.

In a court filing Wednesday, attorneys for BP and the Justice Department argue that the plea agreement imposes "severe corporate punishment" and will deter BP and other deep-water drilling companies from allowing another disaster to occur.

"This severe financial sanction is on top of the $24.2 billion BP has already spent on clean-up efforts, various litigation and other claims settlements," they wrote.

The deal doesn't resolve the federal government's civil claims against BP, which could pay billions more in penalties.

Jessica Manuel, whose father, Keith Blair Manuel, was killed in the explosion, said no amount of money will be enough to make up for her family's loss.

"My baby boy will never know what a wonderful grandfather he had," she wrote. "We can no longer enjoy holidays or family vacations without having a black cloud over us missing our dad."

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2015 - 8:36am*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2013/01/rig-victims-relatives-weigh-bp-plea-deal