

Court Clears The Way For BP Spill Medical Claims

KEVIN MCGILL, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal appeals court has cleared the way for thousands of workers to be compensated for medical treatment for exposure to crude oil or chemical dispersants during the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' action Tuesday involves a settlement approved by a federal judge in January 2013 between BP, workers and some coastal residents from specified beachfront and wetlands areas who said they were injured or sickened during the spill cleanup.

Objections by some members of the settlement class were withdrawn over the past year, resulting in the formal dismissal of appeals. The medical settlement is separate from a larger economic damages settlement, which remains the subject of an appeal.

Among provisions in the medical settlement are programs providing cash payments for physical conditions associated with exposure to oil, such as respiratory problems, skin rashes and neurological issues; comprehensive medical evaluations once every three years for 21 years; and procedures under which covered workers or residents who develop spill-related illnesses in the future could file suit for compensatory damages.

Members of the affected class have a year from Wednesday's effective date to file claims. Neither side estimated the potential monetary value of the settlement. It was unclear how many people might be eligible but the plaintiffs have estimated the number could reach 200,000.

BP said the medical settlement also provides \$105 million for groups working to increase the availability of health care in 17 affected Gulf Coast counties and Louisiana parishes.

Company spokesman Geoff Morrell said in a news release the settlement resolves a substantial majority of medical claims stemming from the Deepwater Horizon accident.

"It's been a long four years, but now hundreds of thousands of people will finally get the medical care and compensation they need," attorneys Stephen Herman and James Roy, who represent plaintiffs in the oil spill litigation, said in a joint statement.

The April 20, 2010, blowout of BP's Macondo well killed 11 workers and spewed millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf.

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Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

Source URL (retrieved on 04/25/2015 - 6:07am):

http://www.chem.info/news/2014/02/court-clears-way-bp-spill-medical-claims?cmpid=related_content