Grieving Family Sues Chevron After Well Explosion

JOE MANDAK, Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — The parents of a contractor killed when a southwestern Pennsylvania natural gas well exploded in February [1] have sued the Chevron subsidiary that owns the well.

The lawsuit filed by the parents of Ian Robert McKee, 27, contends Chevron Appalachia LLC was negligent but doesn't specify how or why. Instead, the lawsuit said only that the "explosion is the sort of event which normally would not occur in the absence of negligence."

John Gismondi, the Pittsburgh attorney for Denise and Robert McKee, said in a statement that the lawsuit was filed so the plaintiffs can demand information and answers from the company.

"If we do not have a lawsuit on record, we have no ability to demand information from Chevron that helps us sort out the details of what happened here, and the sooner we get that information, the further along we will be in protecting the family's interest," Gismondi said Wednesday.

"The investigation is still ongoing, so there is much to learn about the cause of the accident, but right now we know that Chevron was in charge of the well, and something obviously went wrong."

Chevron officials issued a statement saying the company can't comment on the lawsuit, but will respond in court.

"The circumstances leading to the filing are tragic, and our thoughts and prayers are with the friends and family of Ian McKee," the company said.

McKee was a contract technician for Cameron International, a subcontractor. That company isn't named in the lawsuit.

McKee is originally from Warren, in northwestern Pennsylvania. At the time of his death, McKee was living with his pregnant fiancee in Morgantown, West Virginia, not far from the well in Dunkard Township, Greene County, which borders West Virginia.

The explosion at Chevron's Lanco 7H well caused it and a neighboring well to burn for roughly five days. That happened, in part, because a truck and other equipment were superheated by the initial blast and fire, and kept igniting natural gas escaping from the wells. It took crews about two weeks to cap both wells.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has cited Chevron

Appalachia for allegedly failing to prevent the explosion and fires, the release of natural gas and other hazardous substances, and hindering state emergency crews from accessing the site.

The agency hopes to issue a report on the accident by the end of the month, and has remained in talks with Chevron over possible fines and other remedies.

The McKees' lawsuit seeks unspecified damages.

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