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Heard, Robins, Cloud & Lubel, LLP

Deals & Suits - Delton Crawford, et al. v. Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp.

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By John Council

Nine laborers and trades workers won a combined \$23.5 million jury award May 24 after claiming that the asbestos they worked around in Houston oil refineries and chemical plants decades ago caused them to contract lung diseases.

After a three-week trial in 152nd District Judge Harvey Brown's court in Houston, jurors agreed that the workers had been harmed by Owens-Corning asbestos that insulated high-temperature pipes between the 1950s and the early 1970s.

The plaintiffs were represented by partner Denman H. Heard, and associate Joseph W. Woodson of Houston's Williams Bailey Law Firm, and William Connelly, an associate in South Carolina's Ness, Motley, Loadholt, Richardson & Poole.

Owens-Corning Fiberglas was represented by name partner Frank M. Bean, partner Robert D. Arredondo and associate M. Laura Lopez of Houston's Bean & Manning. Defense counsel did not return calls.

Defense arguments included suggestions that the plaintiffs' health problems were related to cigarette smoking, not exposure to asbestos, Heard says. The jury awarded \$13.6 million in actual damages and \$9.9 million in exemplary damages. One of the plaintiffs, Bill Hodges, a former pipefitter from Cranfills Gap, died in 1994 of a lung disease.

As of press time June 6, a final judgment had not been entered in the suit.