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Watson Grinding Fatal Explosion and Fire, Houston, Texas. Credit: U.S. Chemical Safety Board

NEWS

$37.9M Verdict Awarded for Fatal 2020 Watson Grinding Explosion

A Harris County jury returned a $37.9 million verdict against the two non-settling defendants, 3M Co. and Teledyne-Detcon stemming from the January 24, 2020 explosion at Watson Grinding in West Houston.

June 04, 2025 at 03:45 PM

4 minute read

Litigators

By Laura Lorek
Litigation Reporter

A Harris County jury awarded $37.9 million in compensatory damages Tuesday to five victims of a 2020 industrial explosion that killed three people and destroyed hundreds of homes in northwest Houston.

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Rob Kwok

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The verdict against Teledyne-Detcon and 3M Company represents the latest development in litigation stemming from the Jan. 24, 2020, propylene explosion at Watson Grinding, which authorities called one of the worst residential explosions in Texas history.

Following a four-week trial, the jury found the two companies 20 percent responsible for the blast that leveled homes across the West Branch neighborhood, leaving many residents homeless during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our objective was and has always been to make our clients whole from this devastating loss — today we are one step closer to fulfilling our mission to our clients," said Rob Kwok of Kwok Daniel Ltd., who led the trial team alongside Will Moye of the Moye Law Firm.

The Kwok Daniel Ltd. law firm held a press conference Wednesday morning that was broadcast online with some of the victims of the explosion.

Some of the clients impacted included Amelia Diosdado. The blast destroyed her home and she underwent neck fusion surgery after debris fell on her, and her dog died from explosion injuries.

The blast also totaled Margarito Gonzalez's home and he suffered injuries after a ladder fell from the attic and crushed his shoulder, requiring reconstructive surgery. Solomon Nunez worked at a tire shop next to Watson Griding. He suffered traumatic brain injury, concussive syndrome and

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PTSD after the shop was leveled to ground. He was asleep on a couch at the time of the blast and crawled outside. "These are numbers on a piece of paper, and they don't mean anything until they're translated into dollars, and 3M and Detcon could choose to drag this on longer with their lawyers and with appeals," Kwok said.

3M and Teledyne-Detcon did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

On Jan. 24, 2020 at 4:24 a.m., the explosion occured in Watson Grinding's thermal spray room when a propylene gas tank exploded after an employee turned on a light switch, according to court documents. An estimated 600 gallons of propylene filled the spray room. Gas detectors "sounded no alarms," were "not functioning as any safety device whatsoever," Kwok said. The explosion sent debris across a residential area in West Houston, killing three people and causing extensive property damage to more than 400 homes.

Watson Grinding filed for bankruptcy weeks after the incident, initially complicating legal efforts to secure compensation for victims.

More than 1,000 residents ultimately joined the lawsuit, which grew to include over 100 attorneys representing more than 2,200 claimants. The case was moved to multi-district litigation under Judge Mark Davidson after being removed from bankruptcy court. The case is 2021-15294; Master File vs. IN RE: January 24th explosion litigation in the 11th Judicial District Court of Harris County.

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Most parties reached a settlement agreement in July 2022, though Teledyne-Detcon and 3M Company remained as defendants in the trial that concluded Tuesday.

The legal team took more than 120 depositions over several years and worked through a complex allocation process overseen by mediators Alice Oliver-Parrott and Andrew McKinney.

Beyond the main lawsuit, Kwok Daniel litigated more than 100 first-party insurance claims for clients without charging attorney fees, allowing homeowners to use their full insurance proceeds for repairs.

The firm also provided housing assistance to displaced clients during the litigation process.

Kwok said Tuesday's verdict comes in addition to previous settlement distributions, bringing the West Branch neighborhood closer to full recovery nearly five years after the explosion.

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