

Jury awards \$27M verdict to widow

By Renee Flannery

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A Los Angeles County Superior Court jury awarded \$27 million to the widow of a worker who fell to his death at a wastewater treatment plant, finding the defendant, Atlas Construction Supply Inc., 55 percent responsible.

The jury also found a non-defendant party, general contractors USS Cal Builders, was partially at fault in the 2011 accident, the jury found Wednesday.

Edgar Gonzalez was an employee of USS Cal Builders while working at the Hyperion Treatment Plant in Playa del Rey. While he was attempting to put up a 30-foot-wall panel while also elevated at 30 feet, the framework structure he

was attached to collapsed, fell on Gonzalez and caused his death. *Gonzalez et al. v. Atlas Construction Supply Inc. et al.*, BC507755 (L.A. Super Ct., filed May 2, 2013).

The plaintiff, Gonzalez's widow Rosa Gonzalez, alleged the framework was improperly secured and that it was negligence and product liability that caused her husband's death.

Lars Johnson, of Grassini, Wrinkle & Johnson in Woodland Hills, represented the plaintiff.

"The expectation on our side is they're going to have to pay the verdict," Johnson said. "It was a clean trial, presided over by a very experienced judge who made proper rulings. The jury got it right."

Superior Court Judge Suzanne G. Bruguera presided over the trial.

Johnson said USS Cal Builders

hired Atlas Construction Supply Inc. to provide the project plans that showed what the conditions were at the site.

According to Johnson, Atlas had said there was going to be concrete reinforcement under the structure. However, city plans showed no concrete was present.

Douglas C. Purdy, of Morris Polich & Purdy LLP in Los Angeles, and Donald H. Dawson, of Dawson & Clark PC in Detroit, Mich. represented the defendants. Neither could be reached for comment Friday.

Johnson said in a press release that "Atlas' counsel argued that Atlas had no responsibility for the accident at all but that it was all the fault of Gonzalez's employer - contractor USS Cal Builders.

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