

Steffy: Justice delayed for Deepwater Horizon victim

By Loren Steffy

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Almost 1,000 documents have been filed since the lawsuits against BP and other companies involved in the Gulf oil spill were combined in a New Orleans court.

Buddy Trahan cares about only one of them.

Trahan was the most seriously injured survivor of the Deep-water Horizon accident, and his personal injury lawsuit against BP has gotten brushed aside by the trial, set to start next week, that will establish liability for the companies involved.

Trahan, 44, has asked to have his case moved back to state court in Houston, but U.S. District Judge **Carl Barbier**, who's overseeing next week's proceeding, has delayed any decisions on motions such as Trahan's.

As a result, Trahan has been pushed to the back of the line while the companies' financial concerns take center stage.

"No amount of money will ever bring Buddy back to the status quo," Trahan's attorney, **Lance Lubel**, said. "These people, unlike a business, cannot ever be made whole. They deserve the priority."

About a dozen or so claims from survivors and victims' families are still pending, and while some have agreed to have their cases included in the New Orleans proceeding, some, like Trahan, have not.

Instead, while the commercial interests are resolved, Trahan, who lives in Katy, faces the prospect of waiting another year or more to get his day in court - an emotional injury to compound the physical ones he's endured.

A horrific story

Trahan, a Transocean manager who'd flown to the rig with a group of executives the day of the disaster, was in an office when the first explosion erupted. Details from interviews with other survivors, Trahan's attorney and court documents reveal his horrific story.



The blast propelled him more than 30 feet, slamming him into a wall. Badly burned and unconscious, he was impaled through the neck by the protruding hinge of a steel door blown loose by the blast.

Chief electrician Chad Murray, whom I wrote about in December, found Trahan buried under debris while searching for boots for another worker. Trahan was bleeding profusely from the fist-sized hole in his neck and a gash on his thigh that was about 9 inches long and bone-deep. The full extent of his injuries wasn't known until later: 12 broken bones, eight deep lacerations, a crushed knee, a closed head injury and burns over a quarter of his body. Murray and others were able to put Trahan on a stretcher and get him to a lifeboat.

Since his rescue, Trahan has had nine surgeries and faces more, including two knee replacements. In a wheelchair for months, he still can walk only with the aid of crutches, Lubel said.

Trahan, who remains a Transocean employee, filed suit in Houston against BP and seven other companies involved in the Macondo project, but not Trans-ocean. One of the defendants asked that the suit be moved to federal court, where it was corralled with other federal suits into the mega-case in New Orleans.

Looking for attention

In an attempt to get the judge's attention amid the flurry of motions leading up to next week's trial, Lubel filed a tongue-in-cheek motion with references to A Streetcar Named Desire, the Tennessee Williams play set in New Orleans.

"Buddy Trahan needs a ride. He needs that ride every bit as much as he needed the help and kindness of strangers to escape the inferno aboard the Deepwater Horizon," it begins. "And so, like a beleaguered passenger who fruitlessly waits for a streetcar that will not come, Buddy Trahan has waited, and waited, and waited some more to be transported back to state court in Houston so that he may begin anew his long-derailed journey to justice."

Lubel admits his tactic is a long shot. "We didn't know what else to do," he said. "The judge is seeing thousands of mundane motions, and we felt we needed to do something to get his attention."

Just as the race to cap the well after the accident quickly overshadowed the loss of life, so, too, have the commercial interests of the companies involved swept away the plight of those who bore the greatest cost from the disaster, and who most deserve their day in court.

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