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Widow of Former Aluminum Worker Files Benzene Complaint in Federal Court

NEW ORLEANS -- The widow of a former employee of an aluminum manufacturer has filed a benzene complaint in Louisiana federal court, contending that her husband was exposed to "large amounts of benzene" while working at the facility. Millet, et al., v. Employers Insurance Company of Wausau, et al. , No. 12-260 (E.D. La.).

The Jan. 26 complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, names Radiator Specialty, U.S. Steel Corp., and several insurers of the decedent's former employer, Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corp.

Audrey Millet filed the lawsuit as the legal representative of Robert C. Millet, who died in 2011, one month after he was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. According to his widow, Robert Millet worked at Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corp. as a general repair mechanic.

During the course of his employment, Millet was allegedly exposed to benzene while de-dusting coke calcining units and while using Liquid Wrench.

"Mr. Millet sustained tissue damage from each exposure to benzene, resulting in distinct bodily injuries in every year from 1973 to 1978," the complaint says. "As a direct and proximate result of exposure to benzene and products containing high levels of benzene, Mr. Millet suffered injury including, but not limited to AML leukemia, physical damage, several physical and mental pain, fear of further disease processes, disability, medical expenses and loss of enjoyment of life.

The plaintiff further contends that the link between Millet's illness and benzene exposure has been documented since 1948.

"The latency period for the development of injuries after benzene exposure has been known to range from less than five years to in excess of 50 years," the complaint says. "Practically all of the adverse chronic effects of exposure to benzene and its oxidation products are a result of its insidious influence on the blood forming system."

The lawsuit asserts causes of action for negligence, strict product liability, and wrongful death.

Counsel for the plaintiffs are L. Eric Williams of Williams Law Office in Metairie, La.; and Richard J. Fernandez and Amber E. Cisney of Richard J. Fernandez LLC in Metairie, La.

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