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Ramsey manufacturer found liable for death of Wisconsin man

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A St. Louis jury has found that several companies, including a business in Ramsey, are jointly responsible for the 2012 death of a Wisconsin man who died of complications from mesothelioma.

The Okonite Co., a wire and cable maker in Ramsey, was found to be 5 percent liable for the death of electrician Keith Urbach because of his exposure to asbestos.

Based on the verdict, the jury found Urbach's widow eligible for \$4.1 million in damages. However, because Okonite is the only company obligated to the jury's verdict, the widow may only be entitled to receive 5 percent of damages, or an estimated \$200,000. The other companies, which were not at trial, were not affected by this verdict, explained Jay Stuemke, an attorney for the Urbach family, in an email Tuesday.

Urbach, who died six months after he was diagnosed with mesothelioma, worked as an electrician for nearly 40 years for various employers in Wisconsin and Illinois, according to a statement from his attorneys. His lawyers alleged that Urbach worked with an Okonite-made fixture wire that contained asbestos.

Frank Giuliano, general counsel for the privately held Ramsey company, said in a phone call Tuesday that plaintiffs failed to prove a direct connection between Okonite and those wires. "There was no evidence that we made the cable," said Giuliano. He added, "Okonite tried the case because we knew we were innocent."

The final judgment against Okonite will be evaluated at a later date. Okonite has the option to ask the judge to consider dismissing the verdict.

Mesothelioma, a form of cancer, typically occurs in people who have previously been exposed to asbestos, according to the American Lung Association. Most individuals who develop mesothelioma from asbestos were exposed during their work.

Email: anzidei@northjersey.com

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