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Fifteen Asbestos Firms Are Sued for $1 Billion In Worker Health Case

LOS ANGELES (UPI) – A $1 billion class-action lawsuit was filed on behalf of 5,000 shipyard workers, charging 15 major asbestos manufacturers with conspiracy to conceal and to distort reports on the health dangers of asbestos.

More than 1,000 asbestos-related lawsuits are filed nationwide, but Friday's Los Angeles superior court action is believed to be the largest in scope.

The suit asks for general and punitive damages and for medical expenses and loss of earnings on behalf of each injured worker.

"Asbestos was and is an extremely hazardous substance and was and is unsafe and defective when used in the construction, repair and maintenance of seagoing vessels by workers at Todd Pacific Shipyard in San Pedro and the Long Beach Naval Shipyard," the suit contends.

When breathed, the tiny asbestos particles cause severe, disabling and deadly conditions of the lungs and respiratory problems including lung cancer, the suit said.

The suit said the defendant companies caused the workers and their employers to be deprived of knowledge and information of the material's dangerous nature. As a result, the companies "did not take those measures necessary for the protection of the health and lives of plaintiffs."

Additionally, the suit contends the defendants "have been unjustly enriched by the profits of their continued manufacture and sale of asbestos during the period of their concealment of the facts (1938 to present)."

Thus, the suit says, the companies "are indebted" to the injured workers in the amount of their profits since that time—about $1 billion.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said they believed this was the first time in an astestos-related lawsuit that workers had asked for restitution of profits, a legal remedy that generally is confined to one aggrieved businessman suing another businessman.

Defendants in the suit are Johns-Manville Corp.; Raybestos-Manhattan Inc.; Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corp.; Celotex Corp.; Philip Carey Corp.; Eagle-Picher Industries Inc.; Pittsburgh-Corning Corp.; Unarco Industries Inc.; Combustion Engineering Inc.; Standard Asbestos Manufacturing & Insulating Co.; Rubberoid Co.; Keene Corp.; Armstrong Cork Co.; H.R. Purier Co. and Amotex.



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